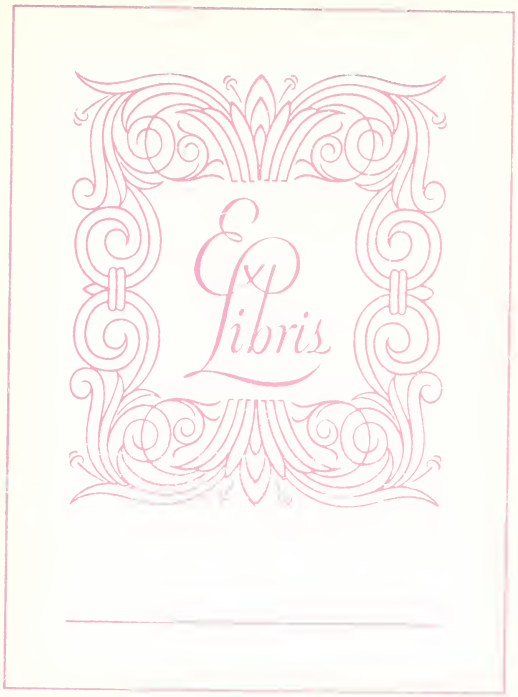
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READER'S DIGEST

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Volume Three

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Summer Selections

THE READER'S DIGEST ASSOCIATION • PLEASANTVILLE, N. Y.

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First Edition

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OLD YELLER

A condensation of the book by

FRED GIPSON

"Old Yeller," copyright © 1956 by Fred Gipson, is published at $2.75 by Harper & Brothers, 49 E. 33 St., New York 16, N. Y.

WHEN the pesky big yellow dog strayed onto the Coates family's frontier homestead, Travis wanted to shoo him on his way. The boy already had his hands full, doing his father's chores and looking after Mama and Little Arliss. But it wasn't long before Old Yeller had showed he wasn't all nuisance — that he could take care of folks pretty well himself — and Travis had decided he would sooner die than part with him. The adventures of boy and dog move with mounting excitement toward a moment of decision in which Travis proves himself the man that circumstances demand he be.

Old Yeller is a moving and eventful short novel to put on the shelf with such enduring favorites as *The Yearling, The Voice of Bugle Ann* and *Good-bye, My Lady.*

CHAPTER 1

We called him Old Yeller. The name had a sort of double meaning. One part meant that his short hair was a dingy yellow, a color that we called "yeller" in those days. The other meant that, when he opened his head, the sound he let out came closer to being a yell than a bark. I remember like yesterday how he strayed in out of nowhere to our log cabin on Birdsong Creek. He made me so mad at first that I wanted to kill him.

It was in the late 1860's, the best I remember. Anyhow, it was the year that Papa and a bunch of other Salt Licks settlers formed a "pool herd" of their little separate bunches of steers and trailed them to the new cattle market at Abilene, Kansas.

This was to get "cash money," a thing that all Texans were short of in those years right after the Civil War. We lived then in a new country and a good one. As Papa pointed out the day the men talked over making the drive, we had plenty of grass, wood and water. We had wild game for the killing, fertile ground for growing bread corn, and the Indians had been put onto reservations with the return of U. S. soldiers to the Texas forts.

"In fact," Papa wound up, "all we lack having a tight tail-holt on the world is a little cash money. And we can get that at Abilene."

Well, the idea sounded good, but some of the men still hesitated. Abilene was better than a thousand miles north of the Texas hill country we lived in. It would take months for the men to make the drive and ride back home. And all that time the womenfolks and children of Salt Licks would be left in a wild frontier settlement to make out the best they could.

Still, they needed money. They told their folks what to do in case the Indians came off the reservation or the coons got to eating the corn or the bears got to killing too many hogs. Then they gathered their cattle and pulled out on the long trail to Kansas.

I remember how it was the day Papa left. I remember his standing in front of the cabin with his horse saddled and his bedroll tied on back of the cantle. I remember how handsome he looked, with his high-crowned hat and his black mustaches drooping in cow-horn curves past the corners of his mouth. And I remember how Mama was trying to keep from crying because he was leaving and how Little Arliss, who was only four and didn't know much, wasn't trying to keep from crying at all. I was thirteen years old, pretty near a grown man. I stood back and didn't let on for a minute that I wanted to cry.

Papa got through loving up Mama and Little Arliss and mounted his horse. He motioned for me to come along, so I walked beside his horse down the trail that led under the big live oaks and past the spring. When we'd gotten out of hearing of the house, Papa reached down and put a hand on my shoulder. "Now, Travis," he said, "while I'm gone, you'll be the man of the family. You take care of Mama and Little Arliss. And there's the cows to milk and wood to cut and young pigs to mark and fresh meat to shoot. But mainly there's the corn patch. If you don't work it right or if you let the varmints eat up the roasting ears, we'll be without bread corn for the winter. Think you can do that?"

"Yessir," I said.

"All right, boy. I'll be seeing you this fall."

Suddenly I remembered. "That horse," I said.

"What horse?" he said, like he'd never heard me mention it before. "You mean you're wanting a horse?"

"Now, Papa," I complained. "You know I've been aching all over for a horse to ride. I've told you time and again." I looked up to catch him grinning at me and felt foolish that I hadn't realized he was teasing.

"What you're needing worse than a horse is a good dog."

"Yessir," I said, "but a horse is what I'm wanting the worst."

"All right," he said. "You act a man's part while I'm gone, and

I'll see that you get a man's horse to ride when I sell the cattle. I think we can shake on that deal."

He reached out his hand, and we shook. It was the first time I'd ever shaken hands like a man. It made me feel solemn and important in a way I'd never felt before. I knew then that I could handle whatever needed to be done while Papa was gone.

I STARTED back up the trail toward the cabin. I guessed maybe Papa was right — I could use a dog. All the other settlers had dogs, big fierce cur dogs used for catching hogs and driving cattle and fighting coons out of the cornfields. They were kept as watchdogs against loafer wolves and other varmints. For the sort of country we lived in, a good dog around the place was sometimes worth more than two or three men. But ever since my old dog, Bell, had got himself killed by a rattler, it made me mad just to think of some other dog's taking his place.

The trail I followed led along the bank of Birdsong Creek through some bee-myrtle bushes. In the top of one a mockingbird was singing. That made me recollect how Birdsong Creek had got its name. Mama had named it the first day she and Papa got there, with Mama driving the oxcart loaded with our house plunder, and with Papa driving the cows and horses. They'd meant to build closer to the other settlers, over on Salt Branch. But they'd camped there at the spring; and the bee myrtle had been blooming white that day, and seemed like in every bush there was a mockingbird, singing his fool head off. It was all so pretty and smelled so sweet and the singing birds made such fine music that Mama wouldn't go on. "We'll build right here," she'd told Papa.

And that's what they'd done. Built themselves a home right here on Birdsong Creek and fought off the Indians and cleared a corn patch and raised me and Little Arliss. Now it was my home, too. And while Papa was gone, it was up to me to look after it.

I came to our spring that gushed clear cold water out of a split in a rock ledge. The water poured into a pothole about the size of a wagon bed. In the pothole stood Little Arliss. Right in our drinking water! I said: *"Arliss!* You get out of that water or I'll cut me a sprout!"

All he did was stick out his tongue at me and splash water in my direction. I got my knife out and cut a green mesquite sprout. Then I headed for him.

Arliss saw that I meant business. He came lunging up out of the pool and lit out for the house, screaming bloody murder. To listen to him, you'd have thought the Comanches were lifting his scalp. Mama came rushing out of the cabin. "Travis," she called out, "what on earth have you done to your little brother?"

I said, "Nothing yet. But if he doesn't keep out of our drinking water, I'm going to wear him to a frazzle." That's what Papa always told Little Arliss when he caught him in the pool. I figured if I had to take Papa's place I might as well talk like him.

Mama stared at me for a minute. I thought she was fixing to argue that I was getting too big for my britches. Lots of times she'd tell me that. But this time she didn't. She just smiled suddenly and grabbed Little Arliss by one ear and held on. "Look here, young squirrel," she said. "You better listen to your big brother Travis if you want to keep out of trouble." Then she made him go sit still while I packed water from the spring. I packed it in a bucket that Papa had made out of the hide of a cow's leg. I poured the water into the ash hopper that stood beside the cabin, so the water could trickle down through the wood ashes and become lye water. Mama would mix this lye water with hog fat and boil it in an iron pot when she wanted to make soap. Little Arliss sat right there watching me till Mama called us to dinner.

After dinner, I didn't wait for Mama to tell me to finish running out the corn middles. I went right out and hooked Jumper, the mule, to the double-shovel and started in plowing where Papa had left off the day before. I figured that if I got an early start I could finish the corn patch by sundown. The only thing Jumper did different from what he'd have done with Papa was to travel with his head turned sideways, watching me every step of the way.

When finally I got back to the house, I found that Mama had done the milking and she and Little Arliss were waiting supper on me. Just like we waited for Papa when he came in late.

I crawled into the corn-shuck bed with Little Arliss that night, feeling pretty satisfied with myself. I'd done my work without having to be told. I'd taught Little Arliss that I wasn't to be trifled with. And Mama could already see that I was man enough to wait supper on. I figured I could handle things while Papa was gone just about as good as he could.

CHAPTER 2

It was the next morning when the big yeller dog came.

I found him at daylight when Mama told me to step out to the dog run and cut down a side of middling meat hanging to the pole rafters. The dog run was an open roofed-over space between the two rooms of our cabin. Sometimes we hung up fresh-killed meat there to cool out.

The minute I opened the door, I saw that the meat was gone, and at the same instant a dog rose from where he'd been curled up on the ground beside the barrel that held our corn meal. He was a big ugly slick-haired yeller dog. One short ear had been chewed clear off and his tail had been bobbed so close that there was hardly stub enough left to wag. But the most noticeable thing to me about him was how thin and starved-looking he was, all but for his belly. His belly was swelled up as tight and round as a pumpkin.

It wasn't hard to tell how come that belly was so full. All I had to do was look at the piece of curled-up rind lying in the dirt beside him, with all the meat gnawed off.

Well, to lose the only meat we had was bad enough. But what made me even madder was the way the dog acted. He didn't even have the manners to feel ashamed. He rose to his feet and came romping toward me, wiggling that stub tail and yelling *Yow! Yow! Yow!* Just like he belonged there and I was his best friend.

"Why, you thieving rascal!" I shouted and kicked at him as hard as I could. He ducked, just in time, so that I missed him by a hair. But nobody could have told I missed, after the way he fell over on the ground and lay there, with his belly up and his four feet in the air, squalling and bellering at the top of his voice. From the racket

he made, you'd have thought I had a club and was breaking every bone in his body.

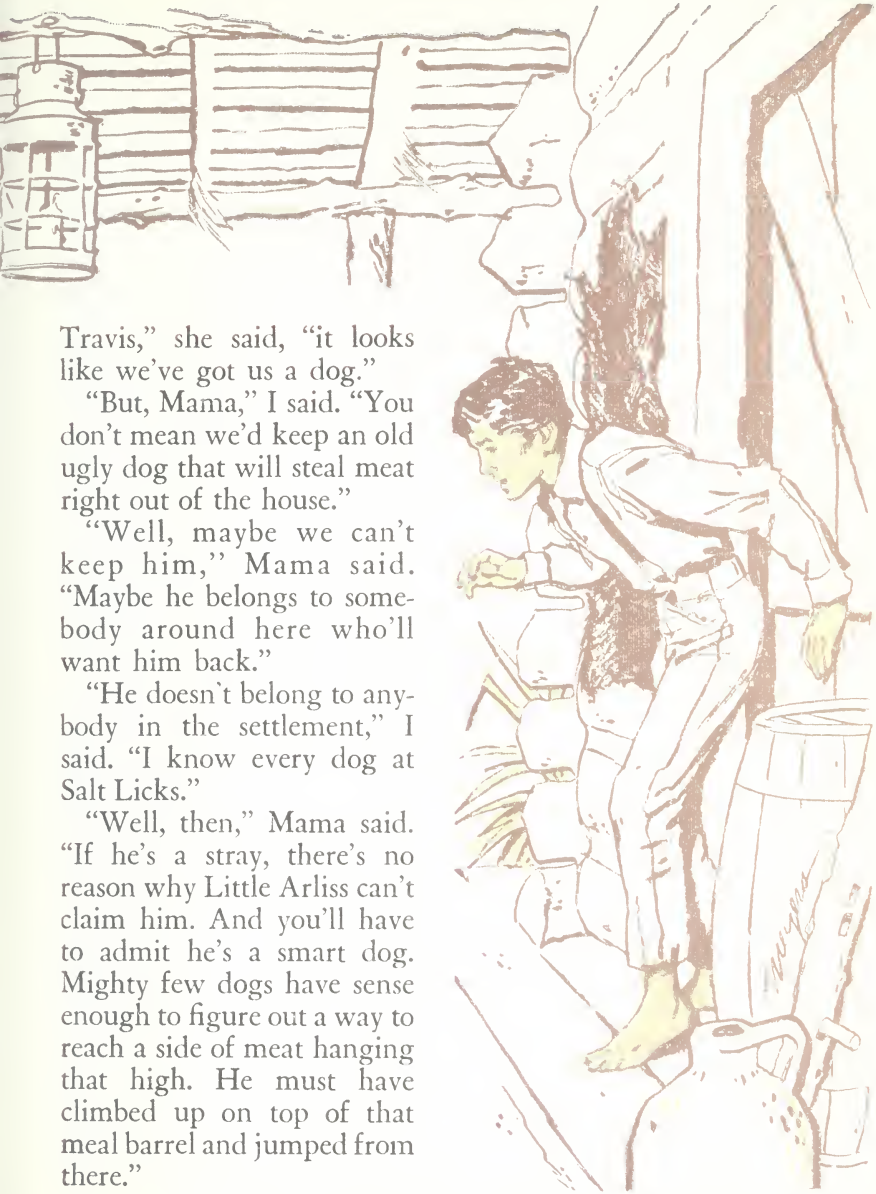
Mama came running to stick her head through the door and say, "What on earth, Travis?"

"Why, this old stray dog has come and eaten our middling meat clear up," I said, and I aimed another kick at him.

Then out came Little Arliss. He was hollering, "A dog! A dog!" He ran past me and fell on the dog and petted him till he quit howling, then turned on me, fighting mad. "You quit kicking my dog!" he yelled fiercely. "You kick my dog, and I'll wear you to a frazzle!"

The big dog got up on his feet now, wagging his stub tail again and licking Arliss's face with his pink tongue.

Mama laughed. "Well,



Travis," she said, "it looks like we've got us a dog."

"But, Mama," I said. "You don't mean we'd keep an old ugly dog that will steal meat right out of the house."

"Well, maybe we can't keep him," Mama said. "Maybe he belongs to somebody around here who'll want him back."

"He doesn't belong to anybody in the settlement," I said. "I know every dog at Salt Licks."

"Well, then," Mama said. "If he's a stray, there's no reason why Little Arliss can't claim him. And you'll have to admit he's a smart dog. Mighty few dogs have sense enough to figure out a way to reach a side of meat hanging that high. He must have climbed up on top of that meal barrel and jumped from there."

I went over and looked at the wooden lid on top of the meal barrel. Sure enough, in the thin film of dust that had settled over it were dog tracks. "Well, all right," I admitted. "He's a smart dog. But I still don't want him."

"Now, Travis," Mama said. "You're not being fair. You had you old Bell when you were little, but Arliss has never had a dog."

I didn't say any more. When Mama got her mind set a certain way, there was no use in arguing with her. But I didn't want that meat-thieving dog on the place, and I didn't aim to have him.

Mama must have guessed what was going on in my mind, for she kept handing me sober looks all the time she was getting breakfast. She fed us corn-meal mush cooked in a pot swung over the fireplace. She sweetened it with wild honey that Papa and I had cut out of a bee tree last fall, and added cream skimmed off last night's milk. It was good eating; but I'd had my appetite whetted for fried middling meat to go with it.

Mama waited till I was done, then said: "Now, Travis, as soon as you've milked the cows, I think you ought to get your gun and try to kill us a fat young doe for meat. And while you're gone, I want you to do some thinking on what I said about Little Arliss and this stray dog."

I WENT and milked the cows and brought the milk in for Mama to strain. Then I got my rifle and went out to the lot and caught Jumper. I tied a rope around his neck, half-hitched a noose around his nose and pitched the rest of the rope across his back. This was the rope I'd rein him with. Then I got me a second rope and tied it tight around his middle. This second rope I'd use to tie my deer onto his back — if I got one.

I mounted Jumper bareback and rode him along Birdsong Creek and across a rocky hogback ridge. I thought how fine it would be if I was riding my own horse instead of an old mule. A quarter of a mile from Salt Licks, I left Jumper tied in a thicket and went on afoot.

It was a fine morning for hunting, with the air still and the rising sun shining bright on the tall green grass and the greener leaves of the timber. I half circled the Licks till I had the little

breeze moving across them toward me, for I knew that no deer would come to the Licks if he caught wind of me first. I took cover under a wild grapevine that hung low out of the top of a gnarled live oak, and sat with my back against the trunk of the tree. I sat with my legs crossed and my rifle cradled on my knees. Then I made myself get as still as the tree.

Papa had taught me that, 'way back when I was little, the same as he'd taught me to hunt downwind from my game. He always said: "It's your moving that catches a deer's eye. If a deer can't smell you and can't see you move, he won't ever know you're there." So I sat there, holding as still as a stump, searching the clearing around the Licks.

The Licks was a scattered outcropping of dark rocks with black streaks in them. The black streaks held the salt that Papa said had got mixed up with the rocks a jillion years ago. All the hogs and cattle and wild animals in that part of the country came there to lick it. One time, Papa said, when he and Mama had first settled there, they'd run clean out of salt and had to beat up pieces of the rock and boil them in water. Then they'd used the salty water to season their meat and corn bread.

Wild game generally came to lick the rocks in the early mornings or late evenings, and those were the best times to come for meat. The killer animals, like bear and panther and bobcats, knew this and came to the Licks at the same time. Sometimes we'd get a shot at them. I'd killed two bobcats and a wolf there; and once Papa shot a big panther right after it had leaped on a mule colt and broken its neck with one slap of its heavy forepaw.

I hoped I'd get a shot at a bear or panther this morning. The only thing that showed up, however, was a little band of javelina hogs, and I knew better than to shoot them. They were small, but make a bad shot and wound one so that he went to squealing, and you had the whole bunch after you, ready to eat you alive.

The javelinas moved away, then there came three cows with young calves and a roan bull. I watched them awhile, then got to watching a couple of playful squirrels in the top of a tree. They were so funny that I laughed, and that's where I made my mistake.

Where the doe had come from and how she ever got so close

without my seeing her, I don't know. Anyhow, there she stood, staring straight at me, sniffing and snorting and stomping her forefeet against the ground. She couldn't have scented me, and I hadn't moved; but I had laughed out loud a little at those squirrels. And that sound had warned her.

Well, I couldn't lift my gun then, with her staring straight at me. She'd see the motion and take a scare. And while Papa was a good enough shot to down a running deer, I'd never tried it and didn't much think I could.

I waited and waited, and still she kept looking at me, trying to figure me out. Finally, she started coming toward me. She'd take one dancing step and then another and bob her head and flap her long ears about, then start moving toward me again. I could feel my muscles tightening up all over. I knew then that I couldn't wait any longer. It was either shoot or bust wide open, so I whipped my gun up to my shoulder.

Like I'd figured, she snorted and wheeled, so fast that she was just a brown blur against my gun sights. I pressed the trigger, hoping my aim was good. After I fired, the black powder charge in my gun threw up such a thick fog of blue smoke that I couldn't see through it. I reloaded, then leaped to my feet and went running through the smoke. What I saw when I came into the clear again made my heart drop down into my shoes.

My doe was running through the trees, all humped up and with her white, pointed tail clamped tight to her rump. Which meant that I'd hit her but hadn't made a killing shot.

I didn't like that. I never minded killing for meat. Like Papa had told me, every creature has to kill to live. But to wound an animal was something else. Especially one as pretty and harmless as a deer. It made me sick to think of the doe's escaping, maybe to hurt for days before she finally died.

I swung my gun up, hoping yet to get in a killing shot. Then suddenly the doe ran head-on into the trunk of a tree. Like she was stone blind. I saw the flash of her light-colored belly as she went down. I waited. She didn't get up.

When I finally reached the place, all out of breath, I found her lying dead, with a bullet hole behind the shoulder. Suddenly I

wasn't sick any more. I felt strong and sure of myself. I hadn't made a bad shot or caused an animal a lot of suffering. All I'd done was get meat for the family, shooting it on the run, just like Papa.

I rode toward the cabin, sitting behind the gutted doe, feeling proud of myself as a provider for the family. Making a killing shot like that on a moving deer made me feel bigger and more important. Too big and important, I guessed, to fuss with Little Arliss about that old yeller dog. When you are nearly a man, you have to learn to put up with a lot of aggravation from little old bitty kids. Let Arliss keep the thieving rascal. I guessed I could provide enough meat for him, too.

That's how I was feeling when I crossed Birdsong Creek and rode up to the spring under the trees below the house. Then suddenly, I felt different. That's when I found Little Arliss in the pool again. And in there with him was the big yeller dog. That dirty stinking rascal, romping around in our drinking water!

"Arliss!" I yelled. "You get that nasty old dog out of the water!"

They hadn't seen me ride up, and I guess it was my sudden yell that surprised them both so bad. Arliss went tearing out of the pool, screaming his head off, and here came the big dog with his wet fur rising along his backbone, baying me like I was a panther.

I didn't give him a chance to get to me. I was too quick about jumping off the mule and grabbing up some rocks. The first rock I threw caught him right between the eyes. He went down, yelling and pitching and wallowing. And just as he came to his feet again, I caught him in the ribs with another one. He turned tail then and took out for the house, squalling and bawling.

But I wasn't the only good rock thrower in the family. Arliss was only four years old, but I'd spent a lot of time showing him how to throw rocks. Now I wished I hadn't. Because about then, a rock nearly tore my left ear off. I whirled around just barely in time to duck another. I yelled, "Arliss, you quit that!" but Arliss wasn't listening. He was too scared and too mad. He bent over to pick up a rock big enough to brain me with if he'd been strong enough to throw it.

Well, when you're thirteen years old, you can't afford to mix in a rock fight with your four-year-old brother. You just can't ex-

plain a thing like that to your folks. All I could do was turn tail like the yeller dog and head for the house, yelling for Mama. And right after me came Little Arliss, packing the big rock.

I outran him, of course; and then here came Mama, running so fast that her long skirts were flying. "What on earth, boys!"

I hollered, "You better catch that Arliss!" as I ran past her. And she did; and it all wound up about like I figured. Mama switched Little Arliss for playing in our drinking water. Then she blessed me out good and proper for being so bossy with him. And the big yeller dog that had caused all the trouble got off scot free. It didn't seem right and fair to me. How could I be the man of the family if nobody paid any attention to what I thought or said?

I hung the doe in the live-oak tree that grew beside the house and began skinning it and cutting up the meat. I sulked and felt sorry for myself all the time I worked. The more I thought about it, the madder I got at the big yeller dog.

I hung the fresh cuts of venison up in the dog run, right where Old Yeller had stolen the hog meat the night before. I did it because I was looking for a good excuse to get rid of that dog. I figured if he stole more of our meat, Mama would have to see that he was too sorry and no-account to keep.

But Old Yeller was too smart for that. He gnawed around on some of the deer's leg bones that Mama threw away; but not once did he ever even act like he could smell the meat we'd hung up.

CHAPTER 3

That Little Arliss! If he wasn't a mess! From the time he'd grown up big enough to get out of the cabin, he'd made a practice of trying to catch and keep every living thing that ran, flew, jumped or crawled. Every night before Mama let him go to bed, she'd make Arliss empty his pockets. One time he brought in a horned toad that got so mad he swelled out round and flat as a Mexican tortilla and bled at the eyes. Sometimes it was a young bird that had fallen out of its nest before it could fly, or a green-speckled spring frog. And once he turned out of his pocket a wadded-up baby copperhead that nearly threw Mama into spasms.

We never did figure out why the snake hadn't bitten him, but Mama took no more chances. She switched Arliss hard for catching that snake. Then she made me spend better than a week taking him out and teaching him to throw rocks and kill snakes.

After the yeller dog came, Little Arliss started catching even bigger game. Like cottontail rabbits and chaparral birds and a baby possum that sulked and lay like dead for the first several hours until he finally decided that Arliss wasn't going to hurt him. Of course, Old Yeller was doing the catching. He'd run the game down and turn it over to Little Arliss. Then Little Arliss could come in and tell Mama a big fib about how he caught it himself.

I told Mama, I said: "Mama, that old yeller dog is going to make the biggest liar in Texas out of Little Arliss."

But Mama just laughed at me and said for me to let Little Arliss alone. She said that if he ever told a bigger whopper than the ones I used to tell she had yet to hear it. Well, I hushed then. If Mama wanted Little Arliss to grow up to be the biggest liar in Texas, I guessed it wasn't any of my business.

All of which, I figure, is what led up to Little Arliss's catching the bear. I think Mama had let him tell so many big yarns about his catching live game that he'd begun to believe them himself.

WHEN it happened, I was down the creek a ways, splitting rails. Swinging that chopping ax was sure hard work. The sweat poured off me and my back muscles ached. The ax got so heavy I could hardly swing it. It got harder and harder to breathe.

An hour before sundown, I was worn down to a nub. Papa could have lasted till past sundown, but I didn't see how I could. I shouldered my ax and started toward the cabin, trying to think up some excuse to keep Mama from knowing I was played clear out.

That's when I heard Little Arliss scream.

Well, Little Arliss was a screamer by nature. He'd scream when he was happy and scream when he was mad or just to hear himself make a noise. But this time was different. The second I heard his screaming, I felt my heart flop clear over. This time I knew Little Arliss was in real trouble. I tore out up the trail leading toward the

cabin and raced through the tall trees in that creek bottom like a scared wolf.

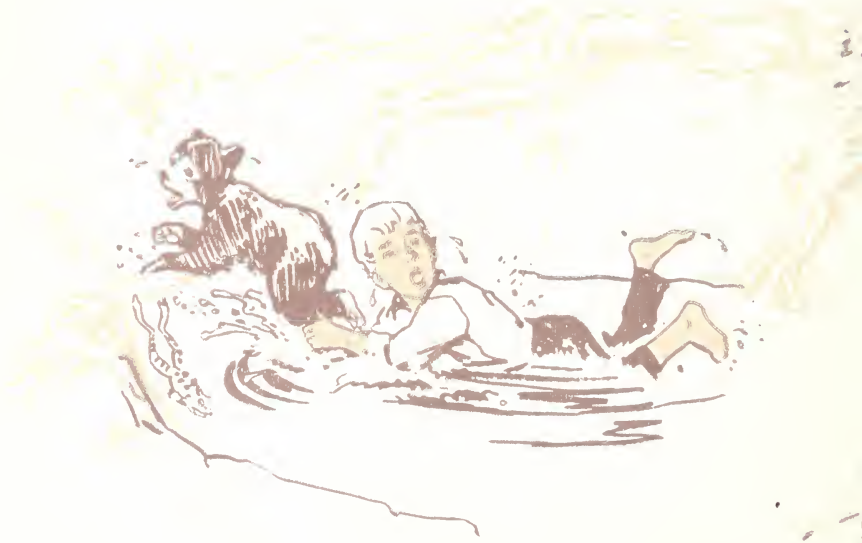
Little Arliss's second scream, when it came, was more frantic-sounding than the first. Mixed with it was a whimpering crying that I knew didn't come from him. It was a sound I'd heard before, but right then I couldn't place it.

Then, from way off to one side came a sound that I would have recognized anywhere. It was the coughing roar of a charging bear.

My heart went to pushing up into my throat, nearly choking off my wind. I strained for every lick of speed I could get out of my running legs. Then, suddenly, I raced out into the open where I could see ahead. And what I saw sent a chill clear through to the marrow of my bones.

There was Little Arliss, down in that spring hole again. He was lying half in and half out of the water, holding onto the hind leg of a little black bear cub no bigger than a small coon. The bear cub was out on the bank, whimpering and crying and clawing the rocks, trying to pull away. But Little Arliss was holding on, scared now and screaming his head off. Too scared to let go.

How come the bear cub ever to prowl close enough for Little



Arliss to grab him, I don't know. And why he didn't turn on him and bite loose I couldn't figure out, either. Unless he was like Little Arliss, too scared to think. But all of that didn't matter now. What mattered was the bear cub's mama. She'd heard the cries of her baby and was coming so fast that she had the brush popping and breaking as she crashed through it. I could see her black heavy figure piling down the slant on the far side of Birdsong Creek. She was roaring mad and ready to kill.

And worst of all, I could see that I'd never get there in time! Mama couldn't, either. She'd heard Arliss, too; and here she came running toward the spring, screaming at Arliss, telling him to turn the bear cub loose. But Little Arliss wouldn't do it.

Now the she-bear was charging across the creek. She was knocking sheets of water high in the bright sun, charging with her fur up and her long teeth bared, filling the canyon with that awful coughing roar.

Then, just as the bear went lunging up the creek bank toward Little Arliss and her cub, a flash of yellow came streaking out of the brush. It was that big yeller dog. He wasn't one third as big and heavy as the she-bear; but when he piled into her from one side, he rolled her clear off her feet. They were down in a roaring tangle of twisting bodies and scrambling feet and slashing fangs.

As I raced past them, I saw the bear lunge up on her hind feet while she clawed at the yeller dog hanging to her throat. I didn't wait to see more. Without ever checking my stride, I ran in and jerked Little Arliss loose from the cub. I slung him toward Mama like he was a half-empty sack of corn, and screamed, "Grab him, Mama! Grab him and run!" Then I swung my chopping ax high and wheeled, aiming to cave in the she-bear's head.

But I never did strike. I didn't need to. Old Yeller hadn't let the bear get close enough.

He couldn't handle her; she was too big and strong for that. She'd stand there on her hind feet, hunched over, and take a roaring swing at him with one of those big front claws. She'd knock him head over heels so far that it didn't look like he could possibly get back there before she charged again, but he always did. He'd hit the ground rolling, yelling his head off with the pain of the

blow; but somehow he'd always roll to his feet. And here he'd come again, ready to tie into her for another round. I stood there with my ax raised, watching them for a long moment. Then from up toward the house, I heard Mama calling: "Come away from there, Travis. Hurry, son! *Run!*"

That spooked me. Up till then, I'd been ready to tie into that bear myself. Now, suddenly, I was scared out of my wits again. I ran toward the cabin.

Old Yeller nearly beat me there. Mama said that the minute he saw we were all in the clear he threw the fight to that she-bear and lit out for the house. The bear chased him for a little piece but, at the rate Old Yeller was leaving her behind, Mama said it looked like the bear was backing up.

If the big yeller dog was scared or hurt in any way when he came dashing into the house, he sure didn't show it like we all did. Little Arliss had hushed his screaming, but he was trembling all over and clinging to Mama like he'd never let her go. And Mama was sitting in the middle of the floor, holding him up close and crying like she'd never stop. And me, I was close to crying, myself.

Old Yeller, though, all he did was come bounding in to jump on us and lick us in the face and bark so loud that there, inside the cabin, the noise nearly made us deaf. The way he acted, you might have thought that bear fight hadn't been anything more than a rowdy romp for the fun of it.

Till Little Arliss got us mixed up in that bear fight, I guess I'd been looking on him about like most boys look on their little brothers. It didn't seem to me like he was hardly worth the bother of putting up with. But that day when I saw him in the spring, so helpless against the angry she-bear, I learned different. I knew then that I loved him as much as I did Mama and Papa, maybe in some ways even a little bit more. So it was only natural for me to come to love the dog that saved him.

What if he was a big ugly meat-stealing rascal? What if he did fall over and yell bloody murder every time I looked crossways at him? He'd pitched in and saved Little Arliss when I couldn't possibly have done it, and that was enough for me.

I petted him and made over him till he was wiggling all over to show how happy he was. I felt mean about how I'd treated him and did everything I could to let him know. I searched his feet and pulled out a long mesquite thorn from between his toes. I washed him with lye soap and water, then rubbed salty bacon grease into his hair all over to rout the fleas. And that night after dark, when he sneaked into bed with me and Little Arliss, I let him sleep there and never said a word about it to Mama.

A WEEK later, Old Yeller helped me catch a wild gobbler that I'd have lost without him. We had gone up to the corn patch to pick a bait of black-eyed peas. I was packing my gun. Just as we got up to the slab-rock fence that Papa had built around the corn patch, I spotted this gobbler doing our pea-picking for us. He was pecking and scratching so hard that he was raising a big dust out in the field. "Why, that old rascal," Mama said. "He's just clawing those pea vines all to pieces."

"Hush, Mama," I said. "Don't scare him." I lifted my gun and laid the barrel across the top of the rock fence. "I'll have him ready for the pot in just a minute."

I was holding my breath and already squeezing off when Little Arliss came running up. "Whatcha shootin' at, Travis?" he yelled at the top of his voice. "Whatcha shootin' at?"

Well, that made me and the gobbler both jump. The gun fired, and I saw the gobbler go down. But a second later he was up again, streaking through the tall corn, dragging a broken wing.

For a second, I was so mad at Little Arliss I could have wrung his neck like a frying chicken's. I said, *"Arliss!* Why can't you keep your mouth shut? You've made me lose that gobbler!"

"Wait a minute!" Mama put in. "I don't think you've lost your gobbler yet. Look yonder!"

I looked, and there was Old Yeller jumping the rock fence and racing through the corn the same way the gobbler went, yelling like I was beating him with a stick. When he barked "treed" a couple of minutes later, it was in the woods the other side of the corn patch. We found him jumping at the gobbler, who had run up a stooping live oak and was perched there, just waiting for me.

So in spite of the fact that Little Arliss had caused me to make a bad shot, we had us a real sumptious supper that night. Roast turkey with corn-bread dressing, and water cress and wild onions that Little Arliss and I had found growing down by the creek.

But when we tried to feed Old Yeller some of the turkey, he wouldn't eat. He'd lick the meat and wiggle his stub tail to show how grateful he was, but he didn't swallow down more than a bite or two.

That puzzled Mama and me because, when we remembered back, we realized that he hadn't been eating anything we'd fed him for the last several days. Yet he was fat and with hair as slick and shiny as a dog eating three square meals a day.

Mama shook her head. "If I didn't know better," she said, "I'd say that dog was sucking eggs. But I've got three hens setting and one with biddy chickens, and I'm getting more eggs from the rest of them than I've gotten since last fall. So he can't be robbing the nests."

Well, we didn't worry about it. That is, not until the day Bud Searcy dropped by the cabin to see how we were making out.

Bud Searcy was a red-faced man with a bulging middle, who liked to visit around the settlement and sit and talk hard times and spit tobacco juice all over the place and wait for somebody to ask him to dinner. Mama said he was shiftless. She said that was the reason the rest of the men left him at home to sort of look after the womenfolks and kids while they were gone on the cow drive. She said the men knew that if they took Bud Searcy along they'd never get to Kansas before the steers were dead with old age. It would take Searcy that long to get through visiting and eating with everybody between Salt Licks and Abilene.

But he did have a little white-haired granddaughter that I sort of liked. She was eleven and different from most girls. She would hang around and watch what boys did, like showing how high they could climb in a tree or how far they could throw a rock or how good they could shoot. But she never wanted to mix in or try to boss things, and the only thing I had against her was her eyes. They were big solemn brown eyes and right pretty to look

at; only when she fixed them on me, it always seemed like they saw everything I was thinking. That always made me sort of jumpy, so that, when I could, I never would look right straight at her.

Her name was Lisbeth and she came with her grandpa the day he visited us. They came riding up on an old shad-bellied pony and trotting behind them was a blue-ticked she-dog that I always figured was one of old Bell's pups.

Old Yeller went out to bay them as they rode up but he didn't go about it like he really meant business, and the first time I hollered at him he hushed. By the time Mama had told Searcy and Lisbeth to come right in, Old Yeller had started a romp with the blue-ticked bitch.

Inside the house, Searcy asked Mama first if we were making out all right, and Mama said we were. Then he told her that he'd been left to look after all the families while the men were gone, a mighty heavy responsibility that was nearly working him to death, but that he was glad to do it. He said for Mama to remember that if the least little thing went wrong she was to get in touch with him right away. And Mama said she would.

Then he leaned his chair back against the wall and went to telling what all was going on around in the settlement. He told about how dry the weather was and how he looked for all the corn crops to fail and the settlement folks to be scraping the bottoms of their meal barrels long before next spring. He told how the cows were going dry and the gardens were failing. He told how Jed Simpson's boy Rosal was sitting at a turkey roost, waiting for a shot, when a fox came right up and tried to jump on him, and Rosal had to club it to death with his gun butt. This sure looked like a case of hydrophobia to Searcy, as anybody knew that no fox in his right mind was going to jump on a hunter.

Which reminded him of an uncle of his that got mad-dog bit down in the piny woods of East Texas. This was 'way back when Searcy was a little boy. As soon as the dog bit him, the man knew he was bound to die; so he went and got a big log chain and tied one end around the bottom of a tree and the other end to one of his legs. And right there he stayed till the sickness got him and he

lost his mind. He slobbered at the mouth and moaned and screamed and ran at his wife and children, trying to catch them and bite them. Only, of course, the chain around his leg held him back, which was the reason he'd chained himself to the tree in the first place. And right there, chained to that tree, he finally died and they buried him under the same tree.

Bud Searcy sure hoped that we wouldn't have an outbreak of hydrophobia in Salt Licks and all die before the men got back from Kansas.

Searcy talked till dinnertime, said not a word all through dinner, and then went back to talking as quick as he'd swallowed down the last bite. He told how some strange varmint had recently started robbing the settlement blind. Or maybe it was even some*body*. Nobody could tell for sure. All they knew was that they were losing meat out of their smokehouses, eggs out of their hens' nests, and sometimes even whole pans of corn bread that the womenfolks had set out to cool. Ike Fuller had been barbecuing some meat over an oven pit and left it for a minute to go get a drink of water and come back to find that a three- or four-pound chunk of beef ribs had disappeared like it had gone up in smoke. Salt Licks folks were getting pretty riled about it, Searcy said.

Listening to this, I got an uneasy feeling. The feeling got worse a minute later when Lisbeth motioned me to follow her down to the spring. We walked clear down there, with Old Yeller and the blue-ticked dog following with us, before she finally looked up at me and said, "It's your big yeller dog. I saw him."

"Do what?" I asked.

"Steal that bait of ribs," she said. "I saw him get a bunch of eggs, too. From one of our nests."

I looked straight at her and she looked straight back at me and I couldn't stand it and had to look down.

"But I'm not going to tell," she said.

I didn't believe her. "I bet you do," I said.

"No, I won't," she said, shaking her head. "I wouldn't, even before I knew he was your dog."

"Why?"

"Because Miss Prissy is going to have pups."

"Miss Prissy?"

"That's my dog, and she's going to have pups and your dog will be their papa, and I wouldn't want their papa to get shot."

I wanted to thank her, but I didn't know the right words. So I fished around in my pocket and brought out an Indian arrowhead that I'd found the day before and gave that to her.

She took it and stared at it for a little bit, with her eyes shining. "I won't never, never tell," she said, then whirled and tore out for the house, running as fast as she could.

I went down and sat by the spring awhile. I was still bothered. If Lisbeth had caught Old Yeller stealing stuff at the settlements, then somebody else might, too. And if they did, they were sure liable to shoot him.

Bud Searcy finally rode off home, with Lisbeth riding behind him. I went then and gathered the eggs. I called Old Yeller off from the house and broke three eggs on a flat rock, and tried to get him to eat them. But he wouldn't. He acted like he'd never heard tell that eggs were fit to eat. All he'd do was stand there and wiggle his tail and try to lick me in the face.

It made me mad. "You thievin' rascal," I said. "I ought to get a club and break your back — in fourteen different places."

But I didn't really mean it, and I didn't say it loud and ugly. "When they shoot you, I'm going to laugh," I told him.

But I knew that I wouldn't.

CHAPTER 4

I DID considerable thinking on what Lisbeth Searcy had told me about Old Yeller and finally went and told Mama.

"Why, that old rogue!" she said. "We'll have to try to figure some way to keep him from prowling. Try tying him."

So I tried tying him. But he could chew through anything we had before you could turn your back. I tried him with rope and then with big thick rawhide string that I cut from a cowhide hanging across the yard fence. By the time we could get off to bed, he'd done chewed them in two and was gone.

"Let's try the corncrib," Mama said on the third night.

Which was a good idea that might have worked if it hadn't been for Little Arliss. I took Old Yeller out and put him in the corncrib and the second that he heard the door shut on him he set up a yelling and a howling that brought Little Arliss on the run. Mama and I both tried to explain to him why we needed to shut the dog up, but Little Arliss was too mad to listen. You can't explain things very well to somebody who is screaming his head off. So that didn't work, either.

"Well, it looks like we're stumped," Mama said.

I thought for a minute and said, "No, Mama. I believe we've got one other chance. That's to shut him up in the same room with me and Little Arliss every night."

"But he'll sleep in the bed with you boys," Mama said, "and the first thing you know, you'll both be scratching fleas and having mange and breaking out with ringworms."

"No, I'll put him a cowhide on the floor and make him sleep there," I said. So Mama agreed and I spread a cowhide on the floor beside our bed and we didn't have a bit more trouble.

Of course, Old Yeller didn't sleep on the cowhide. And once, a good while later, I did break out with a little ringworm under my left arm. But I rubbed it with turpentine, just like Mama always did, and it soon went away. And after that, when we fed Old Yeller corn-meal mush or fresh meat, he ate it and did well on it and never one time bothered our chicken nests.

About that time, too, the varmints got to pestering us so much that a lot of times Old Yeller and I were kept busy nearly all night long. It was the coons, mainly. The corn was ripening into roasting ears now, and the coons would come at night and strip the shucks back with their little hands, and gnaw the milky kernels off the cob. Also, the watermelons were beginning to turn red inside and the skunks would come and open up little round holes in the rinds and reach in with their forefeet and drag out the juicy insides to eat.

So Old Yeller and I took to sleeping in the corn patch. We slept on the cowhide that Yeller never would sleep on at the house. That is, we did when we got to sleep. Most of the night, we'd be up

fighting coons. We slept out in the middle of the patch, where Yeller could scent a coon clear to the fence on every side. We'd lie there and look up at the stars and listen to the warm night breeze rustling the corn blades. Sometimes I'd wonder what the stars were and what kept them hanging up there so high and bright and if Papa, 'way off up yonder in Kansas, could see the same stars I could see. I was getting mighty lonesome to see Papa. With the help of Old Yeller, I was taking care of things all right; but I was sure beginning to wish that he'd come back home.

Then I'd think awhile about the time when I'd get big enough to go off on a cow drive myself, riding my own horse, and see all the big new country of plains and creeks and rivers and mountains and timber and new towns and Indian camps. Then, just about the time I started drifting off to sleep, I'd hear Old Yeller go padding off through the corn. A minute later, his yelling bay would lift, and I'd hear the fighting squall of some coon caught stealing corn. Then I'd jump to my feet and go running through the corn, shouting encouragement to Old Yeller.

"Git him, Yeller," I'd holler. "Tear him up!"

And that's what Old Yeller would be trying to do; but a boar coon isn't an easy thing to tear up. He's not big for size, but the longer you fight him, the bigger he seems to get. On top of that, he's fighting inside a thick hide that fills a dog's mouth like a wad of loose sacking. The coon just squirms and twists around inside that hide and the dog has a hard time ever really biting him.

It was easy for me to go running through the dark cornfields, yelling for Old Yeller to tear up a thieving coon, but it wasn't easy for Old Yeller to do it. He'd be yelling and the coon would be squalling and they'd go clawing and threshing through the corn, making such an uproar that it sounded like murder. But generally, when the fight was all over, the coon went one way and Old Yeller the other, both of them pretty well satisfied to call it quits. We didn't get much sleep of a night while all this was going on, but we had us a good time and saved the corn from the coons.

The only real bad part of it was the skunks. What with all the racket we made coon-fighting, the skunks didn't come often. But when one did come, we were in a mess. Old Yeller could handle

a skunk easy enough. All he had to do was grab it by the head and give it a good shaking. That would break the skunk's neck, but not even a hoot owl can kill a skunk without getting sprayed with his scent. And skunk scent is a smell that won't quit. After every skunk-killing, Old Yeller would roll and wallow in the dirt and go dragging his body through tall weeds, trying to get the scent off; but he couldn't. Then finally, he'd give up and come lie down on the cowhide with me. And of course he'd smell so bad that I couldn't stand him and I'd have to go off and try to sleep somewhere else. Then he'd follow me and get his feelings hurt because I wouldn't let him sleep with me.

Papa always said that breathing skunk scent was the best way in the world to cure a head cold. But this was summertime, when Old Yeller and I didn't have head colds.

Working there, night after night, guarding our precious bread corn from the varmints, I came to see what I would have been up against if I'd had it to do without the help of Old Yeller. By myself, I'd have been run to death and still probably wouldn't have saved the corn. Also, look at all the fun I would have missed if I'd been alone, and how lonesome I would have been. I had to admit Papa had been right when he'd told me how bad I needed a dog.

I guess you can see why I nearly died when a man rode up one day and claimed Old Yeller.

THE MAN's name was Burn Sanderson. He was a young man who rode a good horse and was mighty polite about taking his hat off to Mama when he dismounted in front of our cabin. He said he was a newcomer to Salt Licks. He said that he'd come from down Santonio way with a little bunch of cattle that he was grazing over in the Devil's River country and he'd brought along a couple of dogs to help him herd them. One of these dogs, the best one, had disappeared. He'd inquired around about it at Salt Licks, and Bud Searcy had told him that we had the dog.

"A big yeller dog?" Mama asked, looking sober and worried.

"Yessum," the man said, then added with a grin, "and the worst egg sucker and camp robber you ever laid eyes on. Steal you blind, that old devil will; but there was never a better cow dog born."

Mama turned to me. "Son, call Old Yeller," she said.

I stood frozen in my tracks.

"Go on, son," Mama urged. "I think he and Little Arliss must be playing down about the creek somewhere."

"But, Mama!" I gasped. "We can't do without Old Yeller. He's — "

"Travis!"

Mama's voice was too sharp. I knew I was whipped. I turned and went toward the creek, so mad at Bud Searcy that I couldn't see straight. Why couldn't he keep his blabber mouth shut?

"Come on up to the house," I told Little Arliss. I guess the way I said it let him know that something real bad was happening. He didn't argue or stick out his tongue or anything. He just got out of the water and followed me back to the house and embarrassed Mama and the young man nearly to death because he came packing his clothes in one hand instead of wearing them.

I guess Burn Sanderson had gotten an idea of how much we thought of Old Yeller for he acted uncomfortable about taking the dog off. "Now, Mrs. Coates," he said to Mama, "your man is gone, and you don't have much protection here. Bad as I need that old dog, I can make out without him until your man comes."

But Mama shook her head. "No, Mr. Sanderson," she said. "He's your dog; and the longer we keep him, the harder it'll be for us to give him up. Take him along. I can make the boys understand."

The man tied his rope around Old Yeller's neck and mounted his horse. That's when Little Arliss caught on. He threw a wall-eyed fit. He screamed and he hollered and he went to throwing rocks at Burn Sanderson. One hit Sanderson's horse in the flank. The horse went to pitching and bawling and grunting. This excited Old Yeller. He chased after the horse, baying him at the top of his voice. And what with Mama running after Little Arliss, hollering for him to quit throwing those rocks, it was altogether the biggest and loudest commotion that had taken place around our cabin for a good long while.

When Burn Sanderson finished riding the pitch out of his scared horse, he hollered at Old Yeller to hush up that racket before he got his brains beat out. Then he rode back toward us, wearing a

wide grin. His grin got wider as he saw how Mama and I were holding Little Arliss. We each had him by a wrist and were holding him clear off the ground. "Turn him loose," Sanderson said. "He's not going to throw any more rocks at me."

He swung down from his saddle. He came and got Little Arliss and loved him up till he hushed screaming. Then he said: "Look, boy, do you really want that thieving old dog?"

Little Arliss nodded, then tucked his chin and looked away.

"All right," Burn Sanderson said. "We'll make a trade. I'll let you keep the old rascal, but you've got to do something for me."

He waited till Little Arliss finally got up the nerve to ask what, then went on: "Well, it's like this. I've hung around over there in that cow camp, eating my own cooking till I'm so starved out I don't hardly throw a shadow. Now, if you could talk your mama into feeding me a real jam-up meal of woman-cooked grub, I think it would be worth a one-eared yeller dog. Don't you?"

I didn't wait to hear any more. I ran off. I knew that if I didn't get out of sight in a hurry this Burn Sanderson was going to catch me crying.

Mama cooked the best dinner that day I ever ate. We had roast venison and fried catfish and stewed squirrel and black-eyed peas and corn bread and flour gravy and butter and wild honey and hog-plum jelly and fresh buttermilk. I ate till it seemed like my eyeballs would pop out of my head, and still didn't make anything like the showing that Burn Sanderson made. He was a slim man, but long before he finally sighed and shook his head at the last of the squirrel stew, I was certain of one thing: he sure wouldn't have any trouble throwing a shadow that day. A good, black shadow.

After dinner he said his thank-yous to Mama and told me to come with him. I remembered how Papa had led me away from the house the day he left and knew that Burn Sanderson had something he wanted to talk to me about. At the spring, he turned to me.

"Now, boy," he said, "I didn't want to worry your mama, but there's a plague of hydrophobia making the rounds. I've done shot two wolves, a fox and one skunk that had it. And over at Salt

Licks, a woman had to kill a bunch of house cats that her younguns had been playing with. She wasn't sure, but she couldn't afford to take any chances. And you can't, either."

I felt a scare run through me. After what Bud Searcy had told us about his uncle, I knew hydrophobia was bad. "But how will I know what to shoot and what not to?" I wanted to know.

"Well, you can't hardly tell at first," he said. "Not until they have already gone to foaming at the mouth and are reeling with the blind staggers. But you watch for others that aren't that far along. You take a pet cat. If he takes to fighting at you for no reason, you shoot him. Same with a dog. Take a fox or a wildcat. You know they'll run from you; when they don't and try to make fight at you, shoot 'em. Shoot anything that acts unnatural, and don't fool around about it. It's too late after they've bitten or scratched you. Watch close and don't let anything — *anything* — get to you or your folks with hydrophobia. Think you can do it?"

I swallowed. "I can do it," I told him.

The sternness left Burn Sanderson's face. He put a hand on my shoulder, just as Papa had the day he left.

"Good boy," he said. "That's the way a man talks."

CHAPTER 5

A boy, before he really grows up, is pretty much like a wild animal. He can get the wits scared clear out of him today and by tomorrow have forgotten all about it.

I was plenty scared of the hydrophobia plague that Burn Sanderson told me about. I could hardly sleep that night. I kept picturing in my mind mad dogs and mad wolves snapping and biting at everything in sight. Maybe biting Mama and Little Arliss, so that they got the sickness, too. I lay in bed and shivered and dreamed all sorts of nightmare happenings.

Then, the next day, I went to rounding up and marking hogs and forgot all about the plague. Our hogs ran loose on the range in those days, the same as our cattle. We never fed them, unless maybe it was a little corn during a bad spell in the winter. The rest of the time, they rustled for themselves.

They slept out and ate out, ranging all over the hills and down into the canyons. In the winter, they could always tell a day ahead of time when a blizzard was on the way; then they'd gang up and pack tons of leaves and dry grass into some thicket or cave. They'd pile all this into a huge bed and sleep on it until the cold spell blew over. In season, they fed on acorns, berries, wild plums and persimmons, prickly-pear apples, grass, and bulb plants which they rooted out of the ground. Sometimes, too, they'd eat a newborn calf if the mama cow couldn't keep them horned away. Once, in a real dry time, Papa and I saw an old sow standing belly-deep in a drying-up pothole of water, catching and eating perch that were trapped in there and couldn't get away.

Most of these meat eaters were old hogs, however. Starvation, during some bad drought or extra cold winter, had forced them to eat anything they could get hold of. Papa told a tale about how one old range hog had caught him when he was a baby and his folks got there just barely in time to save him. It was that sort of thing, I guess, that always made Mama so afraid of wild hogs. She didn't like it a bit when I started out to catch and mark all the pigs that our sows had raised that year. She knew we had it to do, else we couldn't tell our hogs from those of the neighbors, but she didn't like my doing it alone.

"But I'm not working hogs alone, Mama," I pointed out. "I've got Old Yeller, and Burn Sanderson says he's a real good hog dog."

"That doesn't mean a thing," Mama said. "All hog dogs are good ones. A good one is the only kind that can work hogs and live. But the best dog in the world won't keep you from getting cut all to pieces if you ever make a slip."

Well, Mama was right. I'd worked with Papa enough to know that any time you messed with a wild hog you were asking for trouble. Let him alone, and he'll generally snort and run from you on sight. But once you corner him, he's the most dangerous animal that ever lived in Texas. Catch a squealing pig out of the bunch, and you've got a battle on your hands. All of them will turn on you at one time and here they'll come, cutting high and fast with gleaming white tusks that they keep whetted to the sharpness of knife points. And there's no bluff to them, either. They'll kill

you if they can get to you; and if you're not fast-footed and don't keep a close watch, they'll get to you.

I knew all this about range hogs; yet I still wasn't bothered about the job facing me, I guess because Papa and I had figured out a nearly foolproof way of doing it. We could catch most of the new pigs without ever getting in reach of the old hogs. It took a good hog dog to pull off the trick; but I was willing to bet that Old Yeller was that good.

He was, too. He caught on right away.

We located our first bunch of hogs at a seep spring at the head of a shallow dry wash that led back toward Birdsong Creek. They'd come there to drink and to wallow around in the potholes of soft cool mud. There were seven sows, two long-tusked hogs and fourteen small shoats. They caught wind of us about the same time I saw them. The old hogs threw up their snouts and said "Woo-oof!" then tore out for the hills, running through the rocks and brush almost as swiftly and silently as deer.

"Head 'em, Yeller," I hollered. "Go get 'em, boy!"

He streaked down the slant, crossed the draw, and had the tail-end pig by the hind leg before the others knew he was after them. The pig set up a loud squeal. Instantly, all the old hogs wheeled. They came at Old Yeller with their bristles up, roaring and popping their teeth. Yeller held onto his pig until I thought they had him. Then he let go and whirled away, running toward me, but slow enough that the old hogs kept chasing him, thinking every second that they'd catch him the next.

When they finally saw that they couldn't, the hogs stopped and formed a tight circle. They faced outward around the ring, their rumps to the center, where all the squealing pigs were gathered. That's the way they fought bear and panther off from their young, and that's the way they aimed to fight us off.

But we were too smart, Old Yeller and I. All we needed was just to move the hogs along to where we wanted them, and Old Yeller already knew how to do this.

Back he went, right up into their faces, where he pestered them with yelling bays and false rushes till they couldn't stand it. With an angry roar, one of the hogs broke the ring to charge him. In-

stantly, all the others charged, too. They were right on Old Yeller again. Just let them get a few inches closer, and one of them would slam a knifelike tusk into his soft belly.

The thing was, Old Yeller never would let them gain that last few inches on him. Always he was just a little bit beyond their reach. It was a blood-chilling game Old Yeller played with the hogs, but one that you could see he enjoyed by the way he went at it.

Finally I hollered at him. "Bring 'em on, Yeller," I said. Then I turned and headed for a big gnarled live-oak tree that stood in a clear patch of ground down the draw a piece.

I'd picked out that tree because it had a huge branch that stuck out to one side. It was low, yet still far enough above the ground to be out of reach of the highest cutting hog.

I climbed up the tree and squatted on the branch. I unwound my rope from around my waist and shook out a loop. Then I hollered for Old Yeller to bring the hogs to me. He did what I told him. He brought the fighting hogs to the tree and rallied them around it. Then he stood back, holding them there while he cocked his head sideways at me, wanting to know what came next.

I soon showed him. I waited till one of the pigs came trotting under my limb. I dropped my loop around him, gave it a quick yank, and lifted him, squealing and kicking, up out of the shuffling and roaring mass below. I clamped him between my knees, pulled out my knife, and marked his right ear with a three-cornered gap in the top side, a mark that we called an overbit. Other settlers had other marks and everybody knew the hog mark of everybody else and we all respected them. We never butchered or sold a hog that didn't belong to us or marked a pig following a sow that didn't wear our mark.

The squealing of the scared pig — he wasn't really hurt — and the scent of his blood made the hogs beneath me go nearly wild with anger. The noise they made and the hate in their eyes was enough to chill your blood. Only, I was used to the feeling and didn't let it bother me. That is, not much. Papa had told me that fear was a right and natural feeling for anybody, and nothing to be ashamed of. "It's a thing of your mind," he said, "and you can train your

mind to handle it just like you can train your arm to throw a rock."

I finished with the first pig and dropped it to the ground. Then, one after another, I roped the others. In less than an hour, I was done with the job, and the only trouble we had was getting the hogs to leave the tree. Old Yeller had a hard time understanding that I finally wanted them out of the way. And even after I got him to leave, the hogs were so mad and so suspicious that I had to squat in the tree for an hour longer before they finally drifted away into the brush.

With hogs ranging in the woods like that, it was hard to know for certain when you'd found them all. But I kept a piece of ear from every pig I marked. When the count reached forty-six and I couldn't locate any new bunches of hogs, Mama and I decided that was all the pigs the sows had raised that year. Then Bud Searcy told me about one bunch of hogs I'd missed.

"They're clear back in that bat-cave country the yonder side of Salt Branch," he said. "Rosal Simpson ran into them a couple of days ago. Said there was five pigs following three sows wearing your mark. Couple of old hogs with them."

I'd never been that far the other side of Salt Branch before, but I figured I could find the place. So early the next morning, I set out with Old Yeller, glad for the chance to hunt hogs a while longer before starting on the corn-gathering. Also, if I found the hogs early, maybe I'd have time to visit the cave and watch the bats come out. I always like to go see the far places and strange sights.

Like one place on Salt Branch that I'd found. There was a high, undercut cliff there and some little gray, sharp-winged swallows building their nests against the face of it. They gathered sticky mud and stuck it to the rock cliff, shaping it into little bulging nests with a single hole in the center. The young birds stuck their heads out through the holes to get at the worms and bugs the grown birds brought them. The mud nests were so thick that, from a distance, the cliff looked like it was covered with honeycomb.

There was another place I liked, too. It was a wild, lonesome place where tall trees grew down in a canyon and leaned out over a deep hole of clear water. In the trees nested hundreds of long-

shanked herons, blue ones and white ones with black wing tips. They built huge ragged nests of sticks and trash and sat around fussing in the trees all day long. And down in the clear water, yard-long catfish lay on the sandy bottom, waiting to gobble up any young birds that fell out of the nests.

The bat cave sounded like another of those wild places I liked to see, but before we were done with the hogs I didn't want to go see a bat cave or anything else.

Old Yeller struck the hogs' trail at a water hole. He ran the scent out into a regular forest of prickly pear. Bright-red pear apples fringed the edges of the pear pads. In places where the hogs had fed, bits of peel and red juice stain lay on the ground.

Old Yeller's bay told me that he'd caught up with the hogs. I heard their rumbling roars and ran toward the sound. They were the hogs that Rosal Simpson had sent word about all right: all of them, except for the five pigs, were wearing our mark. Their faces bristled with long pear spines that they'd got stuck with, reaching for apples. Red juice stain was smeared all over their snouts. They stood backed up against a big prickly-pear clump, daring me or Old Yeller to try to catch one of the squealing pigs.

The closest tree stood better than a quarter of a mile off. It was going to be rough on Old Yeller, trying to lead them to it. Having to duck and dodge around in those prickly pear, he was bound to come out bristling with pear spines. But I couldn't see any other place to take them. I struck off toward the tree, hollering at Old Yeller to bring them along.

A deep cut-bank draw ran through the pear flats between me and the huge mesquite tree I was heading for, and it was down in the bottom of this draw that the hogs balked. They found a place where flood waters had undercut one of the dirt banks to form a shallow cave and they backed up under the bank, with the pigs behind them. No amount of barking and pestering by Old Yeller could get them out. Now and then, one of the old hogs would break ranks to make a quick cutting lunge at the dog. But when Yeller leaped away, the hog would go right back to fill the gap he'd left in the half circle his mates had formed.

I climbed the bank above them, wondering what to do. Then it

came to me that this dirt bank would serve as well as a tree. There were the hogs right under me. They couldn't get to me from down there, not without going fifty yards down the draw to find a place to get out. And Old Yeller wouldn't let them do that.

I shook out a loop in my rope and moved to the lip of the cut bank. The pigs were too far back under me for a good throw. Maybe if I lay down on my stomach, I could reach them.

I did. I reached back under and picked up the first pig, slick as a whistle. I drew him up and worked him over, then dropped him back and watched the old hogs sniff his wound. Scent of his blood made them madder, and they roared louder.

I lay there and waited. A second pig moved out from the back part of the cave but not quite far enough. I inched forward and leaned farther down. I could reach him now. I made my cast, and that's when it happened. The dirt bank broke beneath my weight and I went with it down among those killer hogs.

The crumbling sand all but buried the hogs. I guess that's what saved me, right at the start. I remember bumping into the back of one old hog, then leaping to my feet in a smothering fog of dry dust. I broke to run, but I was too late. A slashing tusk caught me in the calf of my right leg. A searing pain shot up into my body. I screamed, tumbled and went down. I screamed louder then, knowing I could never get to my feet in time to escape the rush of those angry hogs.

It was Old Yeller who saved me. Roaring with rage, he flung himself between me and the killer hogs. Fangs bared, he met them head-on, slashing and snarling as the savage tusks ripped into him. He took the awful punishment meant for me and gave me that one-in-a-hundred chance to get free.

I took it. I leaped to my feet. In wild terror, I ran along the bed of that dry wash, cut right up a sloping bank. I ran till a forked stick tripped me and I fell into some prickly pear. It was the long prickly-pear spines stabbing me in the hip that brought me out of my scare. Panting for breath and with the blood hammering in my ears, I yanked the spines out of my hip, then pulled up my slashed pants to look at my leg. Blood was streaming out of the cut and clear down into my shoe.

I sat and stared at it for a moment, then I got hold of myself again. The gash was a bad one, clear to the bone, I could tell, and plenty long. But it didn't hurt much; not yet, that is. The main hurting would start later, after the bleeding stopped. I guessed I'd better hurry and tie it up and get home as quick as I could. Once that leg started getting stiff, I might not make it. I cut a strip off the tail of my shirt and bound my leg tight. I got up to see if I could walk, and I could.

But when I set out, it wasn't in the direction of home. It was back through the prickly pear toward the dry wash.

I don't quite know what made me do it. I didn't think to myself: "Old Yeller saved my life and I can't go off and leave him. He's bound to be dead, but I have to go back, even if my hurt leg gives out on me before I can get home."

I didn't think anything like that. I just started walking in that direction and kept walking till I found him.

He lay in the dry wash, about where I'd left it to go running through the prickly pear. He'd tried to follow me, but was too hurt to keep going. He was holed up under a broad slab of rock that lay propped up against a round boulder in such a way as to form a sort of cave. He'd taken refuge there from the hogs. They were gone now, but I could see their tracks in the sand, where they'd tried to get at him. I'd have missed him, hidden there under that rock slab, if he hadn't whined as I walked past.

I knelt beside him and coaxed him out from under the rocks. He groaned as he dragged himself toward me. His body trembled while he wiggled his stub tail and tried to lick my hog-cut leg. A big lump came up into my throat. Tears stung my eyes. Here he was trying to lick my wound, when he was bleeding from a dozen worse ones.

He couldn't walk home and I couldn't carry him. His wounds were so bad I might not be able to do him any good anyway, but if I hurried home maybe Mama would come back and help me. Mama always knew what to do when somebody got hurt.

When I shoved Old Yeller back under the rock where he'd be out of the hot sun, I guess he knew that I was fixing to leave him,

and he started whining. He tried to crawl back out of his hole.

I stood and studied for a while. I needed something to stop up that opening so Yeller couldn't get out. Lying on the bank of the wash was a big, heavy scrub mesquite stump.

I slid Old Yeller back under the rock slab. I scolded him and made him stay there till I could haul that tree stump into place. I heaved and sweated and started my leg to bleeding again. But like I'd figured, the stump just about filled the opening. Maybe a strong dog could have squeezed through the narrow gap that was left, but I didn't figure Old Yeller could. I figured he'd be safe in there till I could get back.

He lay back under the rock slab now, staring at me with a look in his eyes that made that choking lump come into my throat again. It was a begging look, and Old Yeller wasn't the kind to beg.

I reached in and let him lick my hand. "Yeller," I said, "I'll be back. I'm promising that I'll be back."

Then I lit out for home in a limping run. His howl followed me. It was the most mournful howl I ever heard.

IT LOOKED like I'd never get back to where I'd left Old Yeller. To begin with, by the time I got home I was so hot and weak and played out that I was trembling all over. That threw a big scare into Mama. I argued and fussed, trying to tell her what a bad shape Old Yeller was in, but she wouldn't pay me any mind. She told me: "We're not going anywhere until we've doctored that leg. I've seen hog cuts before. Neglect them, and they can be as dangerous as snakebite. Now, you just hold still."

I held still while she got hot water and washed out the cut. But when she poured turpentine into the place, I jumped and hollered. It was like she'd burnt me with a red-hot iron. I hollered with hurt till Little Arliss tuned up and went to crying, too.

Mama got some clean white rags and bound up the place. Then she said, "Now, you lie down on that bed and rest. I don't want to see you take another step on that leg for a week."

I was so stunned that all I could do was stare at her. Old Yeller, lying 'way off out there in the hills, about to die if he didn't get help, and Mama telling me I couldn't walk.

I got up and said to her, "Mama, I'm going back after Old Yeller. I promised him I'd come back, and that's what I aim to do." Then I walked through the door and out to the lot.

By the time I got Jumper caught, Mama had her bonnet on. She looked a little flustered, like she didn't know what to do with me, but all she said was, "How'll we bring him back?"

"I'll ride Jumper," I said, "and hold Old Yeller in my arms."

"You know better than that," she said. "He's too big and heavy. You'll give out." She stood tapping her foot for a minute. Suddenly she smiled. "I know what. Get that cowhide off the fence."

I didn't know what she had in mind, but it didn't much matter. She was going with me.

I got the cowhide and Mama brought some pillows and a long coil of rope. She had me tie the cowhide to Jumper's back and bind the pillows down on top of it. Then she lifted Little Arliss up and set him down on top of the pillows. "You ride behind him," she said to me. "I'll walk."

Long before we got there, we could see the buzzards wheeling black against the blue sky and dropping lower and lower with each circling. I guessed it was all over for Old Yeller. But when we moved down into the prickly-pear flats, my misery eased some. For suddenly, up out of a wash ahead rose a flurry of flapping wings. Something had disturbed those buzzards and I thought I knew what it was.

A second later, I was sure it was Old Yeller. His yelling bark sounded thin and weak, yet just to hear it made me want to holler and run and laugh. He was still alive, still able to fight back!

There was a sort of crazy light shining in Old Yeller's eyes when I looked at him. When I reached to drag the stump away, he snarled and lunged at me with bared fangs. I jerked my hands away just in time and shouted "Yeller!" at him. Then he knew I wasn't a buzzard. He sank back into the hole with a loud groan like he'd just had a big load taken off his mind.

Mama helped me drag the stump away. Then we reached in and rolled his hurt body over on its back and slid him out into the light.

Mama said, "Arliss, do you think you could catch Mama a pretty

green-striped lizard? I thought I saw one down there around that first bend."

Little Arliss was as pleased as I was surprised. Always before, Mama had just sort of put up with his lizard-catching. Now she was wanting him to catch one just for her. A delighted grin spread over his face. He turned and ran down the wash as hard as he could go. Mama smiled up at me, and suddenly I understood. She was just getting Little Arliss out of the way so he wouldn't have to look at Yeller's wounds.

Mama did what she could for Old Yeller. He just lay there and licked my hands while I held him. We were wrapping him up in some clean rags that Mama had brought along when here came Little Arliss, running as hard as he'd been when he left. He was hollering at Mama, and in his right hand he carried a green-striped lizard. You never saw such a proud look as he wore on his face when he handed it to Mama. And I don't guess I ever saw a more helpless look on Mama's face. Mama had always been squeamish about lizards and things, and you could tell that it just made her flesh crawl to have to touch this one. But she took it and thanked Arliss. Then she asked him if he'd keep it for her till we got home. Which Little Arliss was glad to do.

"Now, Arliss," she told him, "we're going to play a game. We're playing like Old Yeller is sick and you are taking care of him. We're going to let you both ride on a cowhide, like sick Indians do."

She spread the cowhide hair-side-down upon the ground, and placed the soft pillows on top of it, then she helped me to ease Old Yeller's hurt body onto the pillows.

"Now, Arliss," Mama said, "you sit there on the pillows with Old Yeller and help hold him on. We're playing like he's sick, and when your dog is sick, you have to be real careful with him."

Now I tied a rope around Jumper's neck, leaving the loop big enough that it would pull back against his shoulders. Then, on each side of Jumper, I tied another rope into the one knotted about his shoulders, and carried the ends of them back to the cowhide. I took my knife and cut two slits into the edge of the cowhide, then tied a rope into each one. We measured to get each rope the same length and made sure they were far enough back that the cowhide

wouldn't touch Jumper's heels. Like most mules, Jumper was mighty fussy about anything touching his heels.

"Travis, you ride him," Mama said, "and I'll lead him."

We started off, with Little Arliss crowing at what a fine ride he was getting on the dragging hide. He enjoyed every long hour of it. And a part of the time, I don't guess it was too rough on Old Yeller. The cowhide dragged smooth and even as long as we stayed in the sandy wash. Across the flats, Mama led Jumper in a long roundabout way, keeping as much as she could to the openings where the tall grass grew. The grass would bend down before the hide, making a soft cushion over which the hide slipped easily. But Mama couldn't always dodge the rocky places. The hide slid over the rocks, the same as over the grass and sand, but it couldn't do it without jolting the riders pretty much.

Little Arliss got fun out of that, but the jolting hurt Old Yeller till sometimes he couldn't hold back his whinings. When Yeller's whimpering told us he was hurting too bad, we'd have to stop and wait for him to rest up. At other times, we stopped to give him water from little springs that trickled down through the rocks. Mama'd pack water to him in my hat.

Having to travel so far and so slow, it looked like we'd never get him home. But we finally made it just about the time it got dark enough for the stars to show. By then, my hurt leg was plenty stiff. It was all swelled up and felt as dead as a chunk of wood. When I slid down off Jumper's back, I fell clear to the ground and lay in the dirt, too tired and hurt to get up.

Mama made a big to-do about how weak and hurt I was, but I didn't mind. We'd gone and brought Old Yeller home, and he was still alive. There by the starlight, I could see him licking Little Arliss's face. Little Arliss was sound asleep.

CHAPTER 6

For the next couple of weeks, Old Yeller and I had a rough time of it. I lay on the bed inside the cabin and Yeller lay on the cowhide in the dog run, and we both hurt so bad that we were groaning and whimpering all the time. Sometimes I hurt so bad

that I didn't quite know what was happening. My leg had swelled up till it was about the size of a butter churn. I had such a wild hot fever that Mama nearly ran herself to death, packing fresh cold water from the spring, which she used to bathe me all over, trying to run my fever down. When she wasn't packing water, she was out digging prickly-pear roots and hammering them to mush in a sack, then binding the mush to my leg for a poultice.

Mama waited on Old Yeller just like she did me. She was getting up all hours of the night to doctor our wounds, bathe us in cold water, and feed us when she could get us to eat. On top of that, there were the cows to milk, Little Arliss to look after, clothes to wash, wood to cut, and old Jumper to worry with.

The bad drought that Bud Searcy predicted had come. The green grass all dried up and Jumper took to jumping the field fence and eating the corn. Mama couldn't let that go on; without that corn, we'd have no bread for the winter. She got a rope and tied one end of it to Jumper's right forefoot. To the other end, she tied a big heavy chunk of wood. Jumper could move his drag along enough to graze and get to water; but any time he tried to rear up for a jump, it held him down.

The drag saved the corn, but Mama sure had her hands full, and Little Arliss wasn't any help. With neither of us to play with, he got lonesome. He'd follow Mama around every step she made, getting in the way and feeling hurt because she didn't have time to pay him any mind. When he wasn't pestering her, he was pestering me. He nearly drove me crazy till the day Bud Searcy and Lisbeth came, bringing the pup.

I didn't know about the pup at first. I heard Bud Searcy's talk to Mama when they rode up, but I was hurting too bad even to roll over and look out the door. I remember just lying there, being mad at Searcy for coming. I knew what a bother he'd be to Mama. For all his talk of looking after the women and children of Salt Licks while the men were gone, you wouldn't catch him offering to chop wood or gather in a corn crop. All he'd do was sit all day, talking and chewing tobacco and spitting juice all over the place. On top of that, he'd expect Mama to cook him up a good dinner and Mama had ten times too much to do, like it was.

In a little bit, though, I heard a quiet step at the door. I looked up. It was Lisbeth. She stood with her hands behind her back, staring at me with her big solemn eyes.

"You hurting pretty bad?" she asked.

I was hurting a-plenty, but I wasn't admitting it to a girl. "I'm doing all right," I said.

"We didn't know you'd got hog-cut, or we'd have come sooner," she said. "I brung you a surprise."

I was too sick and worn out to care about a surprise right then; but there was such an eager look in her eyes that I knew I had to say "What?" or hurt her feelings, so I said, "What?"

"One of Miss Prissy's pups!" she said.

She brought her hands around from behind her back. In the right one, she held a pup about as big as a year-old possum. It was a dirty white in color and speckled all over with blue spots about the size of cow ticks. She held it by the slack hide at the back of its neck. It hung there, half asleep, sagging in its own loose hide like it was dead. "Born in a badger hole," she said. "Seven of them. I brung you the best one!"

I thought: If that puny-looking thing is the best one, Miss Prissy must have had a sorry litter of pups. But I didn't say so. I said: "He sure looks like a dandy."

"He is," Lisbeth said. "See how I've been holding him, all this time, and he hasn't said a word."

I'd heard that one all my life — that if a pup didn't holler when you held him up by the slack hide of his neck, he was sure to turn out to be a gritty one. I didn't think much of that sign. Papa always put more stock in what color was inside a pup's mouth. If the pup's mouth was black inside, Papa said that was the one to choose. And that's the way I felt about it.

But right now I didn't care if the pup's mouth was pea-green on the inside. All I wanted was just to quit hurting. I said, "I guess Little Arliss will like it," then knew by the look in her eyes that I'd hurt her feelings, after all. She didn't say anything. She just turned and went out of the cabin and gave the pup to Little Arliss.

I lay there in bed, mad and fretful all day, thinking how silly it was for Lisbeth to expect me to want a pup when I already had me

a full-grown dog. When Old Yeller and I took to the woods again, we wouldn't have time to wait around on a fool pup, too little to follow. I lay there, just waiting for a chance to tell her so, too; only she never did come back. She stayed outside and played with Arliss and the pup till her grandpa finally wound up on his talking and got ready to leave. Then I saw her and Little Arliss come past the door. She looked in at me, then looked away, and suddenly I wasn't mad at her any more. I felt sort of mean. I wished now I could think of the right thing to say about the pup, so I could call her back and tell her.

But before I could think of anything, I heard her grandpa say to Mama: "Now, Mrs. Coates, you all are in a sort of bind here, with your man gone and that boy crippled up. I been setting out here all day worrying about it and I think now I've got a way figured. I'll just leave Lisbeth here to help you all out."

Mama said in a surprised voice: "Why, Mr. Searcy, it's mighty kind of you and all, but we'll make out all right. Lisbeth's such a little girl, she's probably never stayed away from home of a night."

"She's little," Bud Searcy said, "but she's stout and willing. She's like me; when folks are in trouble, she'll pitch right in and do her part. You'll see what a big help she'll be."

Mama tried to argue some more, but Bud Searcy wouldn't listen. He just told Lisbeth to be a good girl and help Mama out, like she was used to helping out at home. Then he rode on off.

I WAS like Mama. I didn't think Lisbeth Searcy would be any help around the place. She was too little and too skinny. But we were wrong. Just like Bud Searcy said, she was a big help. She could tote water from the spring. She could feed the chickens, pack in wood, cook corn bread, wash dishes, and sometimes even change the prickly-pear poultice on my leg.

She didn't have to be told, either. She was right there on hand all the time. She didn't even back off when Mama hooked Jumper to the cart and headed for the field to gather in the corn. That was a job I always hated. It was hot work, and the corn shucks made my skin itch and sting till sometimes I'd wake up at night scratching like I'd stumbled into a patch of bull nettles.

But it didn't seem to bother Lisbeth. In fact, it looked like she and Mama and Little Arliss had a real good time gathering corn. I'd see them drive past the cabin, all three of them sitting on top of a cartload of corn. They would be laughing and talking and having such a romping big time, playing with the speckled pup, that before long I half wished I was able to gather corn, too.

Before they were finished gathering corn, however, we were faced with a trouble a whole lot too big for any of us to handle.

The first hint of it came when Spot failed to show up one evening at milking time. Mama had come in too late from the corn-gathering to go look for her before dark, and the next morning she didn't need to. Spot came up, by herself.

I heard her first. The swelling in my leg was about gone down. I was weak as a rain-chilled chicken, but I was able to sit up in bed a lot and take notice of things. I heard a cow coming toward the house. She was bawling like cows do when they've lost a calf or when their bags are stretched too tight with milk. I recognized Spot's voice.

Spot's new calf recognized it, too. It had stood hungry in the pen all night and now it was nearly crazy for a bait of milk. I could hear it blatting and racing around in the cowpen, so starved it could hardly wait. I called to Mama. "Mama," I said, "you better go let old Spot in to her calf. I hear her coming."

"That pesky Spot," I heard her say impatiently. "I don't know what's got into her, staying out all night like that and letting her calf go hungry."

I heard Mama calling to Spot as she went out to the cowpen. A little later, I heard Spot beller like a fighting bull, then Mama's voice rising high and sharp. Then here came Mama, running into the cabin, calling for Lisbeth to hurry and bring in Little Arliss. There was scare in Mama's voice. I sat up in bed as Lisbeth came running in, dragging Little Arliss after her.

Mama slammed the door shut, then turned to me. "Spot made fight at me," she said. "I can't understand it." She opened the door a crack and stood staring toward the cowpen. "Why, look at her now," she said. "She's not paying one bit of attention to her calf.

She's just going on past the cowpen like her calf wasn't there. She's acting as crazy as if she'd got hold of too much pea vine."

There was a little pea vine that grew wild all over the hills during wet winters and bloomed pale lavender in the spring. Cattle and horses could eat it, mixed with grass, and get fat on it. But sometimes when they got too big a bait of it alone, it poisoned them.

I sat there for a moment, listening to Spot. She was bawling again, like when I first heard her. But now she was heading off into the brush again, leaving her calf to starve.

"But, Mama," I said, "she couldn't have eaten pea vine. The pea vine is all dead and gone this time of year."

Mama turned and looked at me, then looked away. "I know," she said. "That's what's got me so worried."

I thought of what Burn Sanderson had told me about animals that didn't act right. I said, "Cows don't ever get hydrophobia, do they?" I saw Lisbeth start at the word. She stared at me with big solemn eyes.

"I don't know," Mama said. "I've never heard of a cow brute having it. I just don't know."

In the next few days, while Old Yeller and I healed fast, we all worried and watched. All day and all night, Spot walked and bawled. She walked mostly in a wide circle that brought her pretty close to the house about twice a day and then carried her so far out into the hills that we could just barely hear her. She walked slower and her bawling got weaker as she got weaker; but she never stopped walking and bawling.

When the bull came, two or three days later, he was worse. I'd hobbled out to sit in the dog run beside Old Yeller. Mama was in the kitchen, cooking dinner. Lisbeth and Little Arliss had gone off to the creek to play with the pup and to fish for catfish. I could see them running and laughing along the bank, chasing after grasshoppers for bait.

Then I heard this moaning sound and turned to watch a roan bull come out of the brush. He walked with his head hung low and wobbling. He reeled and staggered, like he couldn't see where he was going. He walked head-on into a mesquite tree like it wasn't

there, then came on, staggering and moaning, heading toward the spring.

Right then, for the first time since we'd brought him home, Old Yeller came up off his cowhide bed. I guess the wind must have shifted and brought him the bull's scent; and evidently that scent told him for certain what I was only beginning to suspect.

He rose, with a savage growl. He moved out toward the bull, so trembly weak that he could hardly stand. His lips were lifted in an ugly snarl, baring his white fangs. His hackles stood up in a ragged ridge along the back of his neck and shoulders. I'd seen him act like that before, but only when there was the greatest danger. Never while just facing a bull.

Suddenly, I knew that Mama and I had been fooling ourselves. We'd kept hoping that Spot would get over whatever was wrong with her. Mama and Lisbeth had kept Spot's calf from starving by letting it suck another cow. They'd had to tie the cow's hind legs together to keep her from kicking the calf off; but they'd kept it alive, hoping Spot would get well and come back to it.

Now, I knew that Spot wouldn't get well, and this bull wouldn't either. I knew they were both deathly sick with hydrophobia. I thought of Lisbeth and Little Arliss down at the creek. I came up out of my chair, calling for Mama. "Mama!" I said. "Bring me my gun, Mama!"

Mama came hurrying to the door. "What is it, Travis?"

"That bull!" I said, pointing. "He's mad with hydrophobia and he's heading straight for Lisbeth and Little Arliss."

Mama took one look, said "Oh, my Lord!" in almost a whisper. She didn't wait to get me my gun or anything else. She just tore out for the creek, hollering for Lisbeth and Little Arliss to run, to climb a tree, to do anything to get away from the bull.

I called after her, telling her to wait, to give me a chance to shoot the bull. I don't guess she ever heard me. But the bull heard her. He tried to turn on her, stumbled and went to his knees. Then he was back on his feet again as Mama went flying past. He charged straight for her. He'd have gotten her, too, only the sickness had his legs wobbly. Now, when he fell, he rooted his nose into the ground and just lay there, moaning, too weak even to try to get

up again. By this time, Old Yeller was there, baying the bull, keeping out of his reach, but ready to eat him alive if he ever came to his feet again.

I went and got my gun. I hobbled down to where I couldn't miss and shot the roan bull between the eyes.

We couldn't leave the dead bull to lie there. In a few days, the scent of rotting flesh would drive us out. "We'll have to try to drag it further from the cabin and burn it," Mama said.

"Burn it?" I said in surprise. "Why can't we just leave it for the buzzards and varmints to clean up?"

"Because that might spread the sickness," Mama said. "If the varmints eat it, they might get the sickness too."

Mama went to put the harness on Jumper. I sent Lisbeth to bring me a rope. I doubled the rope and tied it in a loop around the bull's horns. Mama brought Jumper, who snorted and shied away at the sight of the dead animal. Maybe, like Yeller, Jumper could scent the dead bull's sickness. I had to talk mean before we could get him close enough for Mama to hook the singletree over the loop of rope I'd tied around the bull's horns.

But the weight of the bull was too much for him. Jumper grunted and strained. But the best he could do was slide the bull carcass along the ground for about a foot before he gave up.

I knew he wasn't throwing off. Jumper was full of a lot of pesky mule tricks; but when you called on him to move a load, he'd move it or bust something. Well, that was it. There was no moving the dead bull now. I looked at Mama. She shook her head. "I guess there's nothing we can do but burn it here," she said. "But it's going to take a sight of wood-gathering."

It did, too. We'd lived there long enough to use up all the dead wood close to the cabin. Now, Mama and Lisbeth had to go 'way out into the brush for it. They used Jumper to drag up big dead logs. I helped them pile the logs on top of the bull until we had the carcass completely covered, then set fire to them.

In a little bit, the fire was roaring. The heat and the stench of burnt hair and scorching hide drove us back.

It was the biggest fire I'd ever seen, but it took two days and

nights to burn up that bull. We worked all day long each day, with Mama and Lisbeth dragging up the wood and my feeding the fire. Then at night, we could hardly sleep because of the howling and snarling and fighting of the loafer wolves lured to the place by the scent of the roasting meat. The wolves didn't get any of it; they were too afraid of the hot fire. But that didn't keep them from gathering from miles around and making the nights hideous.

And all night long, both nights, Old Yeller crippled back and forth between the fire and the cabin, baying savagely, warning the wolves to keep away. As I lay awake, I sure did wish Papa would come home.

As soon as the job of burning the bull was over, Mama told us we had to do the same for Spot. Mama looked tired, and more worried than I think I'd ever seen her. I guess she couldn't help thinking what I was thinking — that if hydrophobia had sickened one of our cows, it just might get them all.

"I'll do the shooting," I told her. "But I'm going to follow her out a ways from the house to do it. Closer to some wood."

"How about your leg?" Mama asked.

"Think it'll do it some good to be walked on," I told her.

I waited till Spot circled past the cabin again, then took my gun and followed her, keeping a safe distance behind. By now, Spot was so sick and starved I could hardly stand to look at her. She was just skin and bones. I kept waiting for her to cross a bare patch of ground where it would be safe to build a fire. I guess she was a mile from the cabin before I saw that she was about to cross a dry sandy wash where there was plenty of wood.

I hurried around ahead of her and hid behind a turkey-pear bush. I waited till she came stumbling across the sandy bed of the wash, then fired, dropping her in the middle of it.

I'd used up more of my strength than I knew, following Spot so far from the cabin. By the time I got back, I was dead beat.

Mama took one look at me and told me to get to bed. "We'll go start the burning," she said. "You stay on that leg any longer, and it'll start swelling again."

I knew I was too weak and tired to take another walk that far without rest. So I told Mama where to find Spot and told her to leave Little Arliss with me, and watched her and Lisbeth head out, both mounted on Jumper. Mama was carrying a pan full of live coals to start the fire with. At the last minute, Yeller got up off his cowhide. He stood watching them a minute, like he was trying to make up his mind about something; then he went trotting after them. He was still thin and rough-looking and crippling pretty badly in one leg. But I figured he knew better than I did whether or not he was able to travel. I didn't call him back.

As it turned out, it's a good thing I didn't. Only, afterward, I wished a thousand times that I could have had some way of looking ahead to what was going to happen. Then I would have done everything I could to keep all of them from going.

With Little Arliss to look after, I sure didn't mean to drop off to sleep. But I did and slept till sundown, when suddenly I jerked awake, feeling guilty about leaving him alone so long.

I needn't have worried. Little Arliss was right out there in the yard, playing with the speckled pup. I wondered what was keeping Mama and Lisbeth so long. Then I thought how far it was to where the dead cow lay and how long it would take for just the two of them to drag up enough wood and get a fire started, and figured they'd be lucky if they got home before dark.

I wondered when Papa would come back. Mama had said that it was about the time, and I hoped so. For one thing, I could hardly wait to see what sort of horse he was going to bring me. But mainly, this hydrophobia plague had me scared. I'd handled things pretty well until that came along. Of course, I'd gotten a pretty bad hog cut, but that could have happened to anybody, even a grown man. And I was about to get well of that. But if the sickness got more of our cattle, I wouldn't know what to do.

It wasn't until dark came that I really began to get uneasy about Mama and Lisbeth. I couldn't think of any real danger to them. Jumper knew the way home, and they had Old Yeller along. Old Yeller might be pretty weak and crippled yet, but he'd protect them from just about anything that might come their way.

Still, I was uneasy. I'd have gone to see about them if it hadn't

been for Little Arliss. It was past his suppertime; he was getting hungry and sleepy and fussy.

I took him and the speckled pup inside the kitchen and lit a candle. I settled them on the floor and gave them each a bowl of sweet milk into which I'd crumbled cold corn bread. In a little bit, both were eating out of the same bowl. Little Arliss knew better than that and I ought to have paddled him for doing it. But I didn't say a word; I was too worried.

I'd just about made up my mind to go look for Mama and Lisbeth when I heard a sound that took me to the door in a hurry. It was the sound of dogs fighting. The sound came from 'way out there in the dark; but the minute I stepped outside, I could tell that the fight was moving toward the cabin. Also, I recognized the sort of raging yell Old Yeller let out when he was in a fight to the finish. It was the same savage roaring and snarling that he'd done the day he fought the killer hogs off me. The sound of it chilled my blood. I stood rooted to the ground.

Then I heard Jumper snorting and Mama calling in a frightened voice. "Travis! Travis! Make a light, son, and get your gun. Hurry!" I came alive then. I hollered back at her, to let her know that I'd heard. I ran back into the cabin and got my gun. I recollected a clump of oily bear grass that Mama had recently grubbed out, where she wanted to start a new fall garden. A pile of it burning would make a big light.

I ran and snatched up four bunches of the half-dried bear grass, and dumped them in a pile outside the yard fence, then hurried to bring a live coal from the fireplace to start them burning. I fanned fast with my hat. A little flame started, wavered for a moment, then bloomed suddenly and leaped high with a roar.

I jumped back, gun held ready, and caught my first glimpse of the screaming, howling battle that came wheeling into the circle of light. It was Old Yeller, all right, tangled with some animal as big and savage as he was.

Mama called from outside the light's rim. "Careful, son. And take close aim; it's a big loafer wolf, gone mad."

My heart nearly quit on me. There weren't many of the gray loafer wolves in our part of the country, but I knew about them.

They were big and savage enough to hamstring a horse or drag down a full-grown cow. And here was Old Yeller, crippled, trying to fight a mad one!

I brought up my gun, then held fire while I hollered at Mama. "Y'all get in the cabin," I yelled. "I'm scared to shoot till you're out of the line of fire!"

I heard Mama whacking Jumper with a stick to make him go. I heard Jumper snort and the clatter of his hoofs as he went galloping in a wide circle to come up behind the cabin. But even after Mama called from the door behind me, I still couldn't fire. Not without taking a chance on killing Old Yeller.

I waited, while Yeller and the big loafer wolf fought there in the firelight, whirling and leaping and snarling and slashing, their bared fangs gleaming white, their eyes burning green in the half light. Then they went down in a tumbling roll that stopped with the big loafer on top, his huge jaws shut tight on Yeller's throat. That was my chance, and one that I'd better make good. As weak as Old Yeller was, he'd never break that throat hold.

There in the wavering light, I couldn't get a true bead on the wolf. All I could do was guess-aim and hope for a hit. I squeezed the trigger. The gunstock slammed back against my shoulder, and such a long streak of fire spouted from the gun barrel that it blinded me for a second; I couldn't see a thing.

Then I realized that all the growling and snarling had hushed. A second later, I was running toward the two still forms lying side by side. For a second, I just knew that I'd killed Old Yeller, too. Then, as I bent over him, he heaved a big sort of sigh and struggled up to start licking my hands and wagging that stub tail.

It seemed like all the strength went out of me then. I slumped to the ground and was sitting there, shivering, when Mama came and sat down beside me. She put one arm across my shoulders and held it there while she told me what had happened.

Like I'd figured, it had taken her and Lisbeth till dark to get the wood dragged up and the fire to going. Then they'd mounted old Jumper and headed for home. When they came to the crossing on Birdsong Creek, they'd dismounted to get a drink. And while they were lying down, drinking, the wolf came.

He was right on them before they knew it. Mama happened to look up and see the dark hulk of him come snarling toward them across a little clearing. She just barely had time to come to her feet and grab up a dead chinaberry pole before he sprang. She whacked him hard across the head, knocking him to the ground. Then Old Yeller was there, tying into him.

Mama and Lisbeth got back on Jumper and tore out for the house. Right after them came the wolf, like he had his mind fixed on catching them and nothing else. But Old Yeller fought him too hard and too fast. Yeller wasn't big and strong enough to stop him, but he kept him slowed down and away from Jumper and Mama and Lisbeth. "He had to've been mad, son," Mama wound up. "No wolf in his right senses would have acted that way."

"Yessum," I said, "and it's sure a good thing that Old Yeller was along to keep him fought off."

Mama waited a little bit, then said in a quiet voice: "It was a good thing for us, son; but it wasn't good for Old Yeller."

The way she said that gave me a cold feeling in the pit of my stomach. "What do you mean?" I said. "Old Yeller can't be bad hurt. See, he's trotting off toward the house."

Then it hit me what Mama was getting at. I jumped to my feet, wild with hurt and scare. "But, Mama!" I cried out. "Old Yeller's just saved your life! He's saved my life. He's saved Little Arliss's life! We can't — "

Mama got up and put her arm across my shoulder again. "I know, son," she said. "But he's been bitten by a mad wolf."

I stared off into the blackness of the night while my mind wheeled and darted this way and that, like a scared rat trying to find its way out of a trap. "But, Mama," I said. "We don't know for certain. We could wait and see. We could tie him or shut him up in the corncrib or someplace till we know for sure!"

Mama broke down and went to crying then. She put her head on my shoulder and held me so tight that she nearly choked off my breath. "We can't take the chance, son," she sobbed. "It would be you or me or Little Arliss or Lisbeth next. I'll shoot him if you can't, but either way we've got it to do. We just can't take the chance!"

It came clear to me then that Mama was right. We couldn't take the risk. I knew there was very little chance of Old Yeller's escaping the sickness. It was going to kill something inside me to do it, but I knew then that I had to shoot my big yeller dog.

Once I knew for sure I had it to do, I don't think I really felt anything. I was just numb all over, like a dead man, walking.

Quickly, I left Mama and went to stand in the light of the burning bear grass. I reloaded my gun and called Old Yeller back from the house. There I shot him.

CHAPTER 7

Days went by, and I couldn't seem to get over it. I couldn't eat. I couldn't sleep. I couldn't cry. I was all empty inside, but hurting. Hurting worse than I'd ever hurt in my life. Thinking every minute of my big yeller dog, how we'd worked together and romped together, how he'd fought the she-bear off Little Arliss, how he'd saved me from the killer hogs, how he'd fought the mad wolf off Mama and Lisbeth. Thinking that after all this, I'd had to shoot him the same as I'd done the roan bull and Spot.

Mama tried to talk to me about it, and I let her. But while everything she said made sense, it didn't do a thing to that dead feeling I had. Lisbeth didn't say much; she was too shy. But she pointed out that I had another dog, the speckled pup.

"He's part Old Yeller," she said. "And he was the best one of the bunch."

But that didn't help any either. The speckled pup might be part Old Yeller, but he wasn't Old Yeller. He hadn't saved all our lives and then been shot down like he was nothing.

Then one night it clouded up and rained till daylight. That seemed to wash away the hydrophobia plague. At least, pretty soon afterward, it died out completely. But we didn't know that then. What seemed important to us about the rain was that, the next morning after it fell, Papa came riding home through the mud.

The long ride to Kansas and back had Papa drawn down as thin and knotty as a fence rail. But he had money in his pockets, a big shouting laugh for everybody, and a saddle horse for me.

The horse was a cat-stepping blue roan with a black mane and tail. Papa put me on him the first thing and made me gallop him in the clearing around the house. The roan had all the pride and fire any grown man would want, yet was as gentle as a pet.

"Now, isn't he a dandy?" Papa asked.

I said "Yessir!" and knew that I ought to be proud and thankful. But I didn't feel one way or another about the horse.

Papa saw something was wrong. I saw him look a question at Mama and saw Mama shake her head. Then late that evening, just before supper, he called me off down to the spring, where we sat and he talked. "Your mama told me about the dog," he said.

I said "Yessir," but didn't add anything.

"That was rough," he said. "That was as rough a thing as I ever heard tell of happening to a boy. And I'm mighty proud to learn how my boy stood up to it. You couldn't ask any more of a grown man." He stopped for a minute. He picked up some little pebbles and thumped them into the water. "Now, the thing to do," he went on, "is to try to forget it and go on being a man."

"How?" I asked. "How can you forget a thing like that?"

He studied me for a moment, then shook his head. "I guess I don't quite mean that," he said. "It's not a thing you can forget. I don't guess it's a thing you ought to forget. What I mean is, things like that happen. They seem mighty cruel and unfair, but that's how life is, a part of the time. But that isn't the only way life is. A part of the time, it's mighty good. And a man can't afford to waste all the good part, worrying about the bad parts. That makes it all bad. . . . You understand?"

"Yessir," I said. And I did understand. Only, it still didn't do me any good. I still felt just as dead and empty.

That went on for a week or better, I guess, before a thing happened that brought me alive again. It was right at dinnertime. Papa had sent me out to the lot to feed Jumper and the horses. I'd just started back when I heard Mama's voice lifted high and sharp. "Why, you thieving little whelp!" she cried out. Then I heard a shrieking yelp, and out the kitchen door came the speckled pup with a big chunk of corn bread clutched in his mouth. He raced around the house yelling and squalling like somebody was beating

him to death. But that still didn't keep him from hanging onto the piece of corn bread that he'd stolen from Mama.

Inside the house, I heard Little Arliss. He was screaming his head off at Mama for hitting his dog. And above it all, I could hear Papa's roaring laughter. Right then, I began to feel better. Sight of that little old pup, tearing out for the brush with that piece of corn bread, seemed to loosen something inside me.

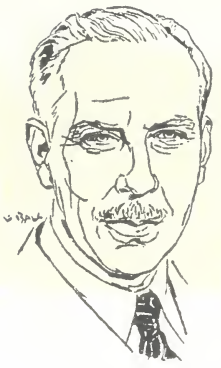
I felt better all day. I went back and rode my horse and enjoyed it. I rode 'way off out into the brush, not going anywhere especially, just riding and looking and beginning to feel proud of owning a real horse of my own.

Then along about sundown, I rode down into Birdsong Creek, headed for the house. Up at the spring, I heard a splashing and hollering. I looked ahead. Sure enough, it was Little Arliss. He was romping in our drinking water again. And right in there, romping with him, was that bread-stealing speckled pup.

I started to holler: *"Arliss!* You get that nasty old pup out of our drinking water."

Then I didn't. Instead, I went to laughing. I sat there and laughed till I cried. When all the time I knew that I ought to go beat them to a frazzle for messing up our drinking water.

When finally I couldn't laugh and cry another bit, I rode on up to the lot and turned my horse in. Tomorrow, I thought, I'll take Arliss and that pup out for a squirrel hunt. The pup was still mighty little. But the way I figured it, if he was big enough to act like Old Yeller, he was big enough to start learning to earn his keep.



Fred Gipson

Fred Gipson, author of *Hound Dog Man, The Home Place* and other books about Texas, was born in that state in 1908. He grew up on a dry-land farm and was exposed at an early age to every job from cotton picking to driving a caterpillar tractor. He attended the University of Texas and subsequently worked as a newspaper reporter and feature writer.

In 1940 he married, and about the same time decided to try his luck as a free-lance writer. Before achieving success in the better magazines he wrote outdoor and adventure stories for the pulps. He recalls that in the first year he made just barely enough to pay for the delivery of his first son.

He lives now with his wife and two sons on a part of the old Gipson homestead, where he devotes his time to writing and to managing a small stock farm.

Harry Black

A condensation of the book by DAVID WALKER

Illustrated by Stevan Dohanos

"Harry Black," copyright © 1956 by David Walker, is published at $3.95 by Houghton Mifflin Co., 2 Park St., Boston 7, Mass.

WHEN Harry Black was a young Army officer, admired by men and women alike for his reckless pride and courage, he liked to think he was a law unto himself. Through war, imprisonment, a tragic marriage, he walked alone.

But in the epic hunt for the Bad One — the great man-eating tiger of Rimli forest in India — Harry Black learned finally that no man can stand alone in his pride and strength. He learned this from Bapu, the devoted native tracker; from Desmond, his best friend; and, most poignantly, from Christian, Desmond's beautiful wife, who played the deepest role of all in the tense and unexpected climax of Harry's life.

"David Walker's narrative is taut and deftly paced, with a cumulative suspense that is enormous."

— J. C. Hitrec in *The Saturday Review*

Chapter One

RIMLI: 1954

THE PASS CUT through the head and shoulders of the high ridge. The walls were vertical. The red rock floor was flat and smooth. The air was still that afternoon. There was a resonance of his breathing in the place. He faced northeast at the far end of the pass, looking down to the Ranipur plain and north to the mountains. He was the king of this small castle, dwarfed by the first Himalayan castles, and they in turn, and so on to the battlements of the world.

He searched back through the pass the other way, toward Rimli. His boots had left rubber patterns at one dusty place. There were no other tracks. He did not think that any animal had come through here last night.

He sat on a rock. The ridges swung down toward Rimli, in a precipitous half circle. He sat above the northern half of Rimli forest preserve. This steep upper half of jungle was framed by a horseshoe of red rock ridges. The flat lower half of jungle jutted into the open plains of India.

The sun was pleasant on this cool afternoon. He felt all right. He put two fingers in his mouth and blew a whistle.

Soon Bapu came, a rubbery small man, along a goat track.

"No tiger has gone that way," said Bapu. He meant by a lesser ravine, forking from the one which they had climbed.

"And no tiger has come through the pass."

"I heard the janwar, the wild things, speak this morning early," Bapu said. "It might have been only a leopard that frightened them." He cleared his throat and hummed a blandly tuneless tune. "Who knows?"

"Go, famous tracker of tigers, and see for thyself that no tiger has come."

Bapu cackled and went.

He watched the forest from aloft. He saw parakeets in hurtling flight, green into green of forest, a graceful discordance of parakeets. Nothing else moved below him. He looked southwest to the bend of the River Garda. It was a muddy river, bright now against the sun. The flat rim of the horizon was broken by one thing only, and that over to the southeast: the tall shaft of a sugar-factory chimney at Bondha, two miles from the forest edge. He wondered who ran the place. He did not want to meet him.

Bapu returned and sat upon his heels.

"Well?"

"A tiger has come. There is one pug mark only, in one dusty place. It is a big tiger, sahib. I think it is the Bad One. But the pug is not that scarred pug of the Bad One."

"When did he come?"

"Since the fall of the night wind." That meant after three or four a.m.

"If thou art right, two sups of whisky."

"All day my stomach has been sick for lack of whisky-wine."

He smiled. He had known Bapu for a week. He liked him.

"I am not a man of this country," said Bapu of the jungle tribe. "My people live yonder." He cocked a finger back southeast. "I had bad trouble," he explained. "I have been at Rimli many seasons. Now there is wickedness in this place, and I have dreams that I will die. But I cannot go back to my own people. The sahib has the hard way of the soldier, knowing death and having understanding of such things. Doubtless Your Honor has been in many wars?"

"In one war only for a short time. I was a captive of a people called Germans, but I escaped and fled to another country."

"Then a tiger wounded Your Honor, perhaps?"

"There are no tigers in that country. But a bomb was hidden in the ground at the crossing place from Germany into the safe country. Thus I was wounded, Bapu."

"It explains many things about the sahib," said Bapu.

The sun was an hour from setting now. He shaded his eyes with his right hand. The Rimli jungle was a broken country, seamed by watercourses, raos, sparsely puddled at this season. From Ranipur and the far side of the hills, Rimli could be approached only by this pass.

KYAA! The alarm call of the chital, the spotted deer, came clearly from a long way down below them. A killer was here. And if Bapu were right, that killer could be the Rimli tiger, the Bad One.

"Come!" he said. He slung the double rifle on his left shoulder and led the way. He walked down the center of a dry watercourse, picking a way round white boulders. A party of brown monkeys loped across, and swung up trees, and the branches swayed and were still. The hard light of day had softened. He sniffed. Rain, he thought. He felt a spiced contentment here with this tiger perhaps in the forest. It was long since he had felt contentment.

Bapu touched him. They had reached a place where the watercourse divided. The two arms swung out and joined below, enclosing an island of grass and thorn trees. Bapu made signs that they separate to inspect two buffaloes which they had tied out for bait. He nodded. He walked by the left fork. He did not have a feeling of tiger here, but he did not trust such intuitions. He heard jungle fowl clucking like domestic hens.

Here was the male water buffalo, tied beside a pool under an acacia tree, staring downstream: it was poor bait for a man-eater, but he had nothing better. He inspected damp sand nearby. A barking deer had recently passed this way. No tiger had passed. Yet he thought from the buffalo's stance that danger might be about.

He swung back to the bottom of the island where Bapu waited. Bapu held the three-eighteen rifle as a workman holds his particular tool. He was a man of fifty or thereabouts, in the relics of some

employer's gray tweed jacket; his skin showed firm and smooth through sleeve tatters, and his bare diaphragm bulged solid.

He led the way again. They were half a mile from the forest resthouse, which was now home for him. The sun was balanced over the treetops; he saw the sliver of the infant February moon. Being a believer in such things, he bowed seven times to the crescent moon. He turned some annas over in his pocket. *I wish to kill the man-eater of Rimli,* he wished with formality. He would have liked to make a second wish — for firm sobriety with a quiet mind. But two wishes were against the rules.

Bapu watched him, smiling. They were in harmony about this.

If the tiger came down to Rimli last night, is it hungry? Bapu thinks it crosses back over the pass to Ranipur soon after killing. Well, I wonder.

They went on. He turned into a nullah — a ravine with earth walls taller than a man, trees closing overhead. There was a dim religious light in here. He saw tracks and heard a peacock scream: *May-awe.* He faced the scream while Bapu inspected. The peacock screamed again. Then a langur monkey hooted. He was sure about the tiger before he saw Bapu's forefinger pointing to say: *The man-eater of Rimli has just moved there.*

He saw a rib of scar-gouge running diagonally across the mark of a left forepaw. The tiger had climbed the bank at an easy place. It was on the prowl.

He followed the trail with Bapu, up the bank, and between high grass, through graceful sal trees, and then a tangle of grass and scrub. He saw the langur's silhouette against an umber sky. It sat perfectly still at the drooped end of a branch, looking at something.

He knew now where the tiger was, but he did not intend to commit suicide in the gloaming by entering that patch of jungle. He would try a little provocation to draw out the tiger. He would make his celebrated imitation of a garrulous hag picking up sticks.

But he delayed because a car was going by on the forest road below them. It came fast from the left, changed into lower gear at the watercourse, whined over it and speeded up. A Land-Rover by the sound. Could his bearer, Cheddi Khan, have been out? The

car clanked past the place where the tiger was hidden and went on in the direction of the forest resthouse.

Had the tiger moved? He did not think so. *"Aii!"* he began in a cracked ancient falsetto. *"Aii! Jangal men bare bare budmashe sher hain."*

Good hag-sounding imitation. Though no jungle crone would annoy the terrible beast by saying *Sher,* the beast's own name. . . .

The tiger moved. He thought that it was coming for him. He was ready. But it crashed at great speed through cover back the way it had come. It was a wary and experienced performer; the car and the wailing might have been a little too much too close together.

The tiger's commotion lingered. Then there was shocked quiet in the jungle.

He had lost a first dim chance with the man-eater of Rimli. He had gained knowledge of his problem. His leg was sore. He felt washed-out and needing five drinks.

"I told the Bara Sahib Bahadur," Bapu said remotely. "I told the great brave master that a wicked spirit guards the Bad One. How else would Tunna Sahib pass in his gharry at such a time?"

He looked round at the little man. "What wicked sahib is this?" he asked.

"I did not say that Tunna Sahib was wicked. I said that a wicked spirit brought Tunna Sahib at such a time. Tunna Sahib from the sugar factory."

"And the appearance of this Tunna Sahib?"

"A long fellow, Your Honor, who is at Bondha since the ending of the last monsoon."

Oh Lord, he thought. Not Desmond Tanner? But he knew the irrational authentic tap of fate.

THEY CROSSED the loose-boarded bridge and walked up the resthouse drive. He saw the man coming down to meet them. All his memories of those prison times were clear; he would never forget Desmond Tanner's lanky lope.

"Hullo, Desmond," he called from a distance.

Tanner stopped. "Who's that?"

HIMALAYAS
Pass of Rimli
to Ranipur
Horseshoe Ridge
Caves
Elephants' Pool
Island
Forest Rest House
Range Office
MAIN FOREST ROAD
River Garda
Village
Sandbank
Banyan Tree
FOREST PATH
LOWER FOREST ROAD
Gate to Bondha
Gate
Rimli Forest
RIVER ROAD

"Harry Black," he said. "How are you, Desmond?" He knew Desmond would be suffering the recollection that he suffered. "I'm damned glad to see you," he went on. In a way he was dizzy with gladness to see the man he had liked, disliked, tolerated, bullied, and loved in their shared adversity.

"How fantastic," Desmond said. "What a small world it is."

Harry smiled, and they walked together. The night wind was beginning from the hills. "You used to be in Bihar," he said.

"They transferred me last October. It's amazing seeing you, Harry. It's absolutely wizard. But isn't your tea garden near Darjeeling? Have you come after the man-eater?"

"It was," Harry said. "And I have. Been here a week."

"We heard there was a hunter here, so we came over to say that the tiger killed a woman in Ranipur yesterday. Which means no chance here, I suppose. Christian heard it on the wireless. You remember Christian, don't you? Your bearer asked her and young Michael in."

Christian, Desmond's wife. "The man-eater came across to Rimli last night," Harry said, "thus bearing out Bapu's pet theory: that the tiger always crosses the pass after a kill. I must drive down to the Range Office to warn them. Go in and get a drink, Desmond, and make my apologies to your wife. I won't be long." But he needed time.

"I'll go and tell them, Harry. Back in a jiffy." Desmond got into his Land-Rover.

"All right," Harry said. "Tell them to batten down. And tell the forest warden, Tara Singh, I'll be along early in the morning."

"Wait," he said on the veranda to Bapu.

The door was ajar, and he heard a woman's voice: "Please leave it, Michael. You know Daddy doesn't like you touching guns."

Harry went in. The oil lamp was on the table; a small boy stood beside the gun rack; Christian Tanner was sitting with her hands out to the fire. Then she put her hands on the ends of the long wooden arms of the Roorkee chair.

He nearly said: *Do you remember me?* But he said only: "It's ages since we met."

"Yes," she said. "Yes, Harry. It's ages, isn't it? How are you?"

The firewood was slipping out onto the hearth. He pushed the logs in, crisscross fashion. They flared up and lent some color to Christian's face. Harry stood the big rifle in the rack and closed the hinged wooden bar across to hold it safely. "You're Michael, are you? My name's Harry Black."

"Shake hands properly with Mr. . . . with Colonel Black."

"Mister," Harry said. "D'you want to have a look at my rifle?" He opened the bar and took it out and showed it to Michael. Boys and Bapus Harry understood and liked until they annoyed him.

"Gosh, it's heavy. Have you shot a tiger with it?"

"Yes, I have."

"How many?"

He did not feel like saying. "How old are you?" he asked.

"I'm eight next birthday — in two weeks. How old are you?"

"Michael, it isn't clever to ask cocky questions that way." She wore a cotton dress, not trousers like most European women up here. "You saw Desmond? He must be thrilled. Where did he go? I heard the car drive off."

"He's gone to give a message to the ranger. Which reminds me. I won't be a minute." He went into the bedroom where Cheddi Khan was lurking. He shut the door. "The man-eater has come," he said quietly. "Bring thy bedding and sleep here."

"Sahib, I will sleep in the go-down. I do not fear the tiger."

"Do as I tell you," he said less quietly in English.

"Very good, Your Honor." Cheddi Khan remained impassive through all storms. He was a stout chap with a brood of sons near Rawalpindi, a good man's man. "The Memsahib did not wish drink things, but drink things are there."

Harry went back. He poured out Bapu's double tot and took it to the veranda. Bapu swigged it in quick time, neat.

"Keep the small rifle, and stand guard while Cheddi Khan moves some things to this house. Sleep early, Bapu, and be ready at the dawn. There will be work for us tomorrow."

"Who knows?" said Bapu. "Who knows what will chance tomorrow?"

Harry went in. "Sorry about all that," he said. "Now won't you have a drink? There's whisky, or gin and lime."

"Yes, please," she said. "Not much whisky and lots of water."

"What about you, Michael? Fresh lime — nimbu pani?"

"Could I have the lime-juice cordial stuff instead?"

Harry took some also. "I'm a cordial man myself," he said, "when I'm not a whisky man." He sat down in the other Roorkee chair. "Tell me," he said, "do you often go back to Canada?"

"Michael and I were there last summer."

"I always remember how kind your parents were. What a coincidence meeting you here." He wished it wasn't here. "How's old Desmond?"

"Just as wonderful and kind as ever," she said with gentleness. "Terribly overworked at present because of the sugar crush."

"I've heard about that," Harry said. "Tea raising is less hectic."

"Are you a planter still?"

"I was. I'm on leave pending retirement, or pending the polite push. I've had tea, and tea's had me, to sum the matter up."

"Oh, I see," she said.

He watched her drink, and he wanted whisky.

"I remember your wedding photo in the *Tatler*. Your wife looked charming."

"Divorced," he said.

Hiatus in the conversation. He turned the oil lamp higher, put more wood on the fire.

"How is your leg, Harry?"

"No trouble at all," he said. "Dust makes it kick up, sometimes." He wished they would go so that he could take it off.

"What's wrong with your leg?" Michael was a good-looking child, bleached and brown from the sun.

"It's a tin one. Want to see?" Harry loosened his jungle boot, and rolled down the sock. "It's aluminum really, not tin."

Michael was enchanted. "Does it go far up?"

"Only halfway to my knee."

"Have you always had it?"

"He lost his leg being brave," Christian said.

"I lost it by running away like a dose of salts." But he was pleased.

"You say very funny things," said Michael. "Shall I call you Harry?"

"Michael!"

"Do," he said. "Call me anything you like, excepting Uncle, which I do not tolerate. Plain Harry is best, perhaps. A drink, Christian?"

"No, thank you." She stared at the fire. "Desmond is being such ages. What did he go to tell them?"

"He went to say that the man-eater is back."

"Here? But the Land-Rover may have broken down. Why didn't you say?" Her eyes flickered to Michael and round the room.

"It's quite safe in a car," he said irritably. He went out.

The wind was loud now in the trees, and the rain smell was stronger. I'll do the job quick, he thought. I'll do it and get out.

He heard the Land-Rover's practical whine coming up the drive. "Desmond's coming," he called.

"Tara Singh went to ground the moment I told him," Desmond reported. "So I had to warn the others myself."

"He's a useless clot and poltroon."

Desmond laughed, and Harry felt better, and they went in.

"Darling, I thought you were never coming." Christian smiled up at Desmond.

Harry took half his daily ration of whisky.

Desmond sat on the edge of the table and swung a leg. "You're thinner, Harry," he said with affection. "How are you?"

Harry smiled. He was happy because Desmond felt all right about the past; he was happy because of the years vanished between now and then. "I'm okay, cock," he said.

Michael was drawn to the rifle rack again.

"Leave it," Harry said.

Michael continued to fiddle.

"Look, boy, when I say leave it, I mean leave it."

Michael left it. Christian frowned. Desmond laughed. "Same deadly Harry Black," he said.

He was not the same. But he had been getting better until his old pal and his pal's wife came along.

"Tell us about the tiger, Harry," Christian said. "Desmond has sat up for it twice, and I have heart attacks each time. I do wish you'd shoot it quickly."

"I will," he said.

"I wouldn't be too confident, old boy. Forty-seven kills in nine months, and nobody's fired anything but a muzzle-loader at it yet. But explain this theory of Bapu's that you mentioned."

"I'll go back to the beginning," Harry said. He forgot about the Tanners while he talked. "Some so-called sportsman came shooting last April and wounded a tiger in the left foreleg. There was no elephant available for a safe pursuit. So our sportsman sweetened Tara Singh — fifty or a hundred chips, I suppose — to keep his mouth shut. Nobody tried to find the tiger. Nobody even reported the wounding. Two weeks later a lame tiger started on human beings.

"The first kill was a mistake, as they usually are — a man blundered onto the animal. One swipe, and a lick. But it had discovered that humans are easy meat. It was starving. What else would it do from then on? One month and seven kills later — just before the monsoon — things were getting chaotic. They called in the Army. The Army, in the inimitable military manner, sent a whole battalion in to drive the tiger up into the head of the Rimli Horseshoe, where they could corner it. The only snag was that they omitted to man the Pass of Rimli, which hardly shows on the map. All the Rimli locals wanted was to get rid of the animal, so they weren't recommending plugs for loopholes. The hunt was a crashing success, with Tommy guns and everybody trigger-happy. The bag was one lance corporal, numerous deer and a porker or two. But, I need hardly mention, no tiger. It had slipped over the pass early in the proceedings. Furthermore, it had found a shuttle road from Rimli to Ranipur.

"And that's about all. The jungle beyond the ridge gives a man-eater far more scope — three hundred square miles, as opposed to about twenty square miles here at Rimli. Which is why I am hunting it at Rimli."

He stood up to pump the Petromax lamp. It was a nasty, useful light, reminding him of prison. He looked at Desmond. The lines of the years do strengthen faces, he thought, whether people get stronger or not. He pumped till the lamp roared white and naked, and he sat down.

"What is Bapu's special idea?" Desmond asked.

"His idea is that the tiger always crosses the pass soon after a kill. First thing he said this morning was that he heard the jungle beasts, the janwar, speaking in the night, and that the Bad One had come. Sure enough, it has — I saw a big pug mark — and sure enough it killed a woman over in Ranipur yesterday. They're creatures of habit, man-eaters. With a tracker like Bapu, and a bit of luck, I can make a quick job of it now." If it did not make a quick job of him. "Have a fill-up, Desmond." He got more for himself too. He would have an extra one tonight.

"I can think of a million things to ask you," Desmond said. But he did not ask them. He was a sensitive chap, with a kindness for other people's troubles; and he lived quietly with his own troubles under a mantle of good looks and bonhomie and mundane remarks. He was not at all clever. "Do you remember the night you threw a wine bottle at that sentry on the catwalk?"

Christian laughed. "Once you two start remembering, you'll never stop. We *must* go back to Bondha, darling. It's long after Michael's bedtime." She smiled at her son. She was more beautiful than the last time, and less pretty.

"I was thinking," Michael said. "I was thinking you're a bit lame and the tiger's lame. That's sort of funny."

Lame man hunts lame tiger was the kind of thing small boys thought sort of funny, and grown-up fools made symbols of, but at their peril.

"Can you come over tomorrow evening?" Desmond asked. "Bondha's only five miles from here."

"Depends on what develops," he said carefully. "May I just blow in the first chance I get?"

"As long as you do." There was no strain at all between them. "He always was a hermit type at heart, Christian."

"Was he? Well, do come, Harry."

They were leaving at last. Not quite. "By the way, Harry, I'd like to be in on the tiger if you want me. I can always sneak a few hours off. I know my experience is nil compared with yours. Still, if I could be the slightest help . . ." He said it in a hurry and left it in the air. Christian sighed.

"Many thanks," Harry said. "I shall probably take you up on that. I detect feminine objections, but that's your affair." Well and lightly said. He intended to do the job alone. He took his rifle from the rack. "I'll follow part of the way." He loaded. "Come on, Desmond." They went out. "Shine it round."

Desmond shone the torch. The wind blustered now, and dry leaves flew with it. It was cold. Wait, tiger. Wait for me.

"All aboard," Harry said to Michael round the door. "All aboard the lugger, mate." They climbed into the cars.

He dipped his lights and followed their scud of dust — down the drive, over the rumbling bridge, along the main forest road. No animals moved. After a sharp right, the road ran straight for Bondha. He gave a double toot, and would have turned without ado. But they stopped. So he got out and went to Desmond's window.

"Thanks, chum," said Desmond.

"Good night, all you Tanners."

"Good night," she said. "Take care."

"Good night, Plain Harry. Please come soon."

He laughed at Plain Harry. Everyone laughed.

Harry Black drove home. Of all people. Of all the people I should have to meet. And yet he was very pleased to meet them.

Chapter Two

CLOUDS GATHERED, but rain did not come. Seven buffaloes were led to sacrifice as bait each afternoon; seven jogged youthfully home each morning.

Shooting man-eaters was not the conventional way of finding peace, but for Harry it was a possibility. He spent ten hours a day quartering the jungle. He found no tiger and he found no tracks.

"Sahib, it is always thus," said Bapu on the third day. "We must wait."

Bapu was cursed and left behind that day. Harry went with his rifle and one companion — which was a single consuming purpose such as he had known in his prison days. Sobriety was now easy. At

night, after drinking one drink and eating Cheddi's indifferent hash, he fell into deep dream-sailing sleep.

The fourth morning was gray, as drab as any in the Scottish hills, a rarity in the harsh land. The heights of Rimli were invisible. He turned on the windshield wiper. With a flannel shirt, cardigan and bush jacket, he still felt the chill.

On the lower side of the main forest road, there were many negotiable tracks. On the upper side, there were few. He turned up toward the pass now, and put the old rattletrap Land-Rover in low-ratio four-wheel drive. She was his temporarily, on loan from the Government of India. They lurched and scratched through scrub jungle, ugly country.

I really ought to go see the Tanners, he thought. Desmond had been over last evening and had left a note: *Come tomorrow you bloody man.* Harry recognized the jocularity of hurt feelings. But he did not think that he would pay a call this evening.

Walk and sit and walk all day. Listen in the forest in the early night. Had the tiger gone?

"Perhaps the Bad One has crossed to Ranipur again," he offered to Bapu, holding rifles in the other seat.

"No, sahib."

"Or to other jungles outside Rimli."

"Other tigers may do this; but not the Bad One."

"Thou knowest the Bad One's goings as a man knows the goings of his friend."

"The Bad One waits for me," said Bapu. He mentioned this often as a matter of sure fact; yet he did not seem fearful.

They left the car. They were going to the place Bapu called the Elephants' Pool. They crossed the rao — white stones dampened to gray — and climbed. It was drizzling now.

The pool lay in a clearing flanked by bamboo, a drinking place for wild elephant and other jungle dwellers. Harry and Bapu sat under a silk-cotton tree in flower. Birds squabbled high above at the sweet red pods, and red pods were scattered on the ground, like blowzy tulips. The drizzle was just audible on leaves, and clouded the mirror of the pool. And now a chital and her fawn were in the clearing. They moved sedately to the water's edge,

drank without apprehension and walked up the bank, dappled deer into dappled cover.

A sambar belled its loud alarm, from somewhere above the pool. Once, and no more. That might mean a man; but he did not think so, for there were no men working in this part. He was almost sure that the alarm meant business.

They circled the water's edge and climbed by the spring-fed stream. Harry paused. He saw thirty or forty yards to a bend, through open grass, with rock rising at the sides. Safe passage up the middle. He went fast again. His metallic ankle joint clicked faintly. He gave some time to maintenance. Now he stepped across the stream. Bapu came close behind. Bapu hissed: but there was no need of warning. Scouts were already out ahead.

The chital were ranged in a ragged line across the glade above them — two hinds, three fawns, a yearling with antler spikes. They faced the tall grass and small trees at the next left-hand bend. They were in a stew, turning to flee and turning back, making short aimless dashes. But all the ears centered to one place. Something threatened there.

Harry went on till deer milled about him. A fawn ran up to stand within arm's length. It pleased him to be taken for a friend against a greater fear.

This was not sambar country; but a sambar must have wandered here. His chital bodyguard was weaving in skittery indecision. Had the sambar fled or had it died there?

A vulture arrived as evidence. It lumbered in level flight to land upon a tree. It waited. If a grown sambar had been killed, a tiger would have killed it.

Harry moved another twenty yards. He felt an aura of dissent from Bapu; but Bapu dutifully climbed a tree to cover him. Harry had not yet tested Bapu in an emergency, but he thought Bapu was the best jungle better half that he had known.

He turned and climbed up through thorny wild-plum bushes to bare rock above the ravine. He passed under the vulture's tree. He looked over to Bapu, who nodded once slowly from his tree. Nothing moved below in the long grass and trees. Nothing sounded but a hiss of drizzle, a tranquil gurgle of the stream.

Harry had climbed up to short-cut a wide bend in the stream. He was going to approach whatever was in that bend downhill, his right flank protected by the wall of the ravine. An ordinary tiger might grumble or might demonstrate; but it would go. The man-eater of Rimli would wait quietly, or would leave quietly. Such was its reputation.

Thunder rumbled many miles away, like a rumor of guns from distant battle. Now he was down in the ravine. He could still see Bapu, up his tree. Harry edged along the wall. He noticed some egg-sized pebbles. He put them in his left jacket pocket. A small isolated patch of grass was on his left. First clear that. Harry lobbed his stones methodically, swish and thud. Nothing whatsoever, but he could not be sure. He went on down. His heart beat fast and steady. He continued to throw stones. No movement.

Bapu whistled a mellow tone. Harry looked up, and Bapu waved his hand to the far bend of the stream and the wooded rise beyond. He meant that something had gone that way.

Harry went on into a patch of khair trees, acacias. He found the sambar stag, a very large animal, heavier than any tiger. It lay in a trampled circle on the grass, a noble beast, killed at the prime. Harry had once seen the killing of a sambar in the wild. It was a sight he sometimes dreamed again, just as he dreamed his stepping upon the mines.

He went back to Bapu's tree. "What hast thou seen, Bapu?"

"I have seen the grass swaying. It went slowly slowly, sahib."

"Come down now and seek tracks. I will stand guard."

He went up the rise where the tiger had gone. They generally came back if disturbed just after killing. This was the only protected way it could come. He crouched for a view below bushes.

The man-eater fed on its human victims once; it rarely returned. But this was an animal kill, and only a couple of mouthfuls eaten. The man-eater might return, if it was hungry. Five days since the Ranipur kill? Yes, it might be very hungry.

Bapu called him. They stood in the open glade.

"Is it the Bad One?"

"There is one pug on rock, but the rain . . ." Bapu's throaty whisper, "Sahib, I do not know."

"I thought the way of its going was like the Bad One."

"I too, sahib."

Harry put Bapu back up the tree to stand guard. Now he himself must get a machan — a hunting platform — and other paraphernalia for a watch by night for the tiger. He walked fast downglade, past the Elephants' Pool, across the rao and to the car.

HARRY'S bearer, Cheddi Khan, and a forest guard returned with him, bringing the machan. Then they left, with Bapu. Their voices faded lower down the grade. He was alone.

The machan was a wooden framework, crisscrossed with string, roped from ringbolts to a tree. He sat with his back against the trunk, the rifle resting on his knees. He had a clear view down to the dead sambar, a leaf-chinked view to either side. He had tested his torch apparatus, clamped above the gun barrels.

Thunder grumbled. It was nearly half past four. Nothing had come while Bapu held the fort. Now a storm was coming.

KOKLI, a bird called. *I am the tree pie.* It landed on a tree beside the sambar. It descended branch by branch, cautious but bold. It landed on the sambar's hindquarters, dipped in for a stringy sinew, tugged back. It flew to a branch, downed the morsel, down for more. Then it flew away, black and brown and long white tail.

A click? A touch of twig on twig? Now would be the time, before the storm, before night falls. Harry began to turn his head slowly to the right. He saw the tiger's ruffed face, large and male.

But he could shoot only straight in front. His heart made its lively tiger-pump. He heard the wind a long way off. It marched up from the plains, from Bondha, where Christian Tanner lived. It rushed now at the lower fringes of the Rimli forest. He watched the tiger; the tiger had not moved.

The wind grew; it was roaring; it was nearly here. The tiger's face vanished. Harry clung to the tree trunk, and the wind came. It arrived mightily, warmly thrashing and blasting. Then it was gone, and the whipped trees rose again, but some were falling, and many boughs were crashing.

He watched the bushes where the tiger had been. His machan was tilted now by the wind. He wedged himself for safety but at

the cost of comfort. His stump throbbed. He hoped that it would go to sleep.

Now a cold mountain wind came. Lightning rippled, cold and deathly. He counted seconds from the brightest flashes to the ripple of the thunder. Nine seconds at eleven hundred feet a second makes about two miles.

Brighter. One, two, three, four, five: bang crash BOOM. This storm was sneaking down the horseshoe ridge, close to his defenseless head.

Now the rain came, rods of water in the violet flashes. It was cold. He crouched in his ground sheet, on his swaying tree. Time went by fits and starts, by teeth chattering, by two stealthy swiggings from his flask, by false departure of the storm, by true departure. The storm flickered to extinction. The wind died and trees dripped. The earth was loud with water. The sky was lovely, the famous jeweled velvet of India, his love.

The sambar was a dim bundle now below him. They had tied a rope from his tree to the sambar's neck. The kill must be anchored against the power of tiger, who could remove six hundred pounds of property as easily as you could lift your suitcase.

But there were no tiger indications. Harry heard elephant behind him, feeding on bamboo, splintering and swishing a hundred yards or so away. Grown elephants had no enemies to fear, not even man if they minded their own business. But the men who moved in jungles feared elephants much more than ordinary tigers. Harry hoped they would not pick up his scent. His tree was stout enough to ride out a storm, not elephants.

The bamboo noises stopped. They had gone away, perhaps. Elephant moved with careless noise, or in uncanny quiet. The back of Harry's neck began to tingle. He turned on his tilted perch. An elephant faced him at the corner of the glade. The ears moved. The trunk quested about but did not curl. If the black mood of must was on it, things could be troublesome. Go, bloody elephant, do go. I do not want to kill you.

The elephant skirted his tree, followed by a smaller tusker, with the ponderous lightness of some wonderful big ladies. They passed out of sight.

It was half past four. He had been twelve hours up this tree. He was cramped and cold and sleepless. This was tiger time before the dawn. He watched and listened. Night wore a paler rim above the eastern hills. Jackals howled. *A-EE,* they yelped. *A-EE. Where is the dead Hindu? Where . . . where . . . over here . . . over here. . . .*

Small masticating noises on the other side, chop of jaws. Now what would that be?

Slowly! he warned himself. Quietly now! The tiger stood broadside, head lowered to its kill. He switched on his beam. The tiger's head whipped round. He fired. The recoil punched him off balance, and he saved himself. The tiger exploded through grass across the glade and up the rocky slope. Silence. A slow heavy roll and tumble back. The legs thrashed. It lay in the open. He gave it the other barrel. A tame end to the Rimli man-eater.

Harry waited up his tree, and tried to beat out his cramps. They would have heard the shots. He could not get down alone.

The Land-Rover came. And here they were — Bapu in his hallowed jacket; Cheddi Khan, that urbane rogue; the forest guard, a dressy fellow.

Bapu went to the tiger and knelt. "Oh, sahib," he called across to Harry Black. "This is not the Bad One."

Chapter Three

HARRY measured the tiger. It was nine foot four between pegs. Bapu began to skin it.

Harry climbed up alone to the Pass of Rimli. The rock floor was still damp, and it gave categorical information. The man-eater had not crossed over from Rimli since the storm. He thought now that it had gone back to Ranipur the first night, that night the Tanner family had come to his resthouse. He did not think that it could hide itself for five days in the limited Rimli area, in country so broken that all movement must be channeled eventually into trackable places. Tigers traveled to live.

But Bapu had vague feelings that it was still at Rimli. He could not explain, or he would not. Primitive people knew what they

knew, instinct being strong and reason weak. "I think the Bad One is still at Rimli," Bapu insisted.

"Why, Bapu?"

"Sahib, I do not know. I am not sure." Bapu turned slowly, with his head cocked. He seemed to search round the compass, like a radar aerial sweeping knowingly on a ship. "Yesterday I knew, but today I do not know."

"I think the Bad One has gone," Harry said. "If there is no news by tomorrow morning, we people will go to Ranipur."

"Ham log?" Bapu said. "We people?" He rubbed his foot on the tiger skin, grasping coarse fur delicately between toes. "But sahib, I have been at Rimli for many seasons, and never have gone to other places."

"Art thou too old for new things? I need thee, Bapu."

"Wherever the Master needs me, there I will go." He looked directly at Harry, which he rarely did. "Also, I fear now to stay here without protection."

"From the tiger?"

"No, sahib, from men. This I have heard, that Tara Singh, the hairy budmash, plots against me." Bapu's hatred of the range officer was evident.

"Then we shall go to Ranipur together, and each night there will be two sups of whisky-wine."

Bapu grinned, raised magically from despond. He went back to the half-skinned body of the tiger.

Back at the resthouse, Harry went to bed, but sleep stayed away. There's only one way with the likes of Tara Singh, he thought. I shall have to scare the lights out of him about Bapu. Then off to Ranipur tomorrow. *Won't we ever meet again, never ever, Harry?* That was what Christian had said, long ago.

He got up and drove over to the Range Office, a pleasant white-washed building among trees. Corpulent Tara Singh appeared at the office door. "Good afternoon, Mr. Black. I heard story of fine tiger but rotten luck." He was affable. "I tell you one thing, sir, man-eater has gone to Ranipur again. That is my considered opinion." He was an obtuse, complacent Sikh, who liked Harry

as little as Harry liked him. He was not yet afraid of Harry Black.

"I came to tell you that if there is no news of the tiger by tomorrow morning, I shall be going round to Ranipur."

"That is wise decision, Mr. Black, very proposal I was making."

"Would you send them a message to expect me at the resthouse?"

"Gladly, sir, but our telephone line is broken since storm, alas. My men are constantly tracing fault and as yet not finding. Communications will be fully established in no time doubtless."

"I should like to take Bapu with me, Ranger Sahib," Harry said politely. He was a guest here, and formalities had to be observed.

Tara Singh came to the edge of the veranda, clasping hands upon his stomach. "But Mr. Black, this is beyond possibility. The man Bapu is officially employed forest shikari of this division. Transfers cannot be permitted under regulations."

"I am not asking about transfers. I am saying that I want to take him with me temporarily. The Inspector General told me to use anyone I wanted anywhere I wanted. Perhaps you would like to see his letter again, or is that clear already?"

"Clear as a bell, Mr. Black, but there is added complication. There is question of man's personal safety. *Keep personal eye on Bapu,* said Divisional Forest Officer to me. *This is only sure protection,* D.F.O. said. Sir, you are off seeking tiger every day with peerless bravery. You do not have time for hearing dangerous common gossip. . . ." Tara Singh coughed. "No educated person would believe rumors, of course. But our common people, they have much hate and fear of Bapu. They say one thing: *Bapu is in league with man-eater, advising as to next victim.* They say one thing: *Bapu is man-eater personally.* They say one thing: *Why is Bapu never seen by single human soul at time of killing?* Merest tommyrot, Mr. Black, by simple folk in dire terror. But most perilous for Bapu. At Rimli Bapu is protected under my personal vigilance. What would happen at Ranipur?"

What did Bapu say himself? He said: *There is wickedness in this place. . . . The Bad One waits for me. . . . The hairy budmash plots against me.*

I wonder, though. I just wonder if Bapu is holding out on me about something.

"I remember a strange thing in Bengal," Harry said. He was going to make this strange thing suit the case; it was an old Indian tale, and true in essence. "There was a district near the Assam border where they were plagued by a man-eating tiger. It had killed over two hundred people in four years. You can imagine the reign of terror. You can imagine how desperately every man, woman and child prayed for deliverance."

"Indeed yes, Mr. Black."

"It happened that there were two holy men in that area. One was a true guru, a teacher, who had torn out all the roots of sin. The other was a false follower of Siva, a lecher with an odor of sanctity. He feared and hated the good guru. He saw a way of being rid of him. How do you think he did it, Tara Singh?"

"I am all ears, sir." There was a fixity of countenance.

"The bad guru had only to hint. He had only to say: *Someone must help this monster. It is the wicked spirit of one among us. Surely we can find out whether anyone wanders abroad when the tiger kills.*

"Now the good guru did wander abroad at all hours, oblivious of danger. He was so saintly that life meant nothing to him.

"It is always easy to sow a seed of wickedness in the minds of men." Harry paused. I'm doing well, he thought. Now, careful. "These terrified people began to whisper. They whispered that the guru took on the form of the man-eater, or that the man-eater took on the form of the guru. *He has been communing with the tiger,* they whispered when he returned to his hut from a vigil on a hill-top. *A man was killed yesterday afternoon. Did you know that the guru's robe was soaked with blood when he came home at dusk?*

"Soon, Tara Singh, they came to the wicked guru. *What shall we do to the monster? Shall we kill him, holy one?*

"No, said the wicked guru. *Do not kill him without trial. That would be wickedness. Tie him to a stake outside his hut, and call to the tiger. If the tiger does not come, you will have certain proof.*

"So they took the saintly guru and tied him to a stake. He made no protest. They waited in the hut, calling loudly, sure that the man-eater would not come. Was this guru not the man-eater in human form? But the man-eater came that night and killed him."

"This is terrible story, sir."

"I haven't quite finished. Next day the elders of those villages met together, and they were ashamed. They said: *Undoubtedly that poor holy one was innocent. We made a grievous error.*

"Now, these were simple people who had sinned from fear. They were not wicked men, but only the tools of one wicked man. So they realized their lamentable mistake and tied the wicked guru himself outside his ashrama. I arrived on the scene the morning after he was killed by the tiger. I followed the blood trail and shot the man-eater.

"I might have reported the villagers to the police, but it seemed to me that justice of a sort had been done, and that the only sufferer had been the wise guru, who was too saintly a character in any case to mind about death. So I appointed myself judge and jury and dismissed the case. You are the first person who has heard this story. Was I right, do you think, Tara Singh?"

"Oh, indubitably, yes, Mr. Black."

"To come back to Bapu," Harry said gently, "I wonder if you put these ideas into the minds of these simple people?"

"That would be unworthy most false accusation, sir."

"I wonder if you still object to my taking Bapu to Ranipur?"

"Indeed not, Mr. Black. I was obeying D.F.O.'s personal instructions only. As for false gossip, I was recounting only."

Harry looked at Tara Singh. "You may or may not have started these stories about Bapu. I think you did. I am a private individual, with influence of course, but no official power. The power I have is that I don't care about my skin; hence I will stop at nothing. The weakness you have is that you care too much about your skin; hence will do anything to save it. Two kinds of wicked gurus. All I want to say is that, if harm came to Bapu, it would be most unfortunate for Tara Singh. I hope you understand me."

The Range Officer did not answer. He looked unhappy.

"Good afternoon." Harry drove away toward Bondha.

I wonder what sort of a chap this Tara Singh really is, he thought. But what am I, really? Certainly capable of almost anything in some moods. *Harry,* Mother said. *There is a look in your face sometimes that makes me quite afraid. You must try to fight*

your temper, darling. Try every day. Well, I did. I learned in the end to button my temper down. That was the thing I achieved in prison. I learned to believe in human goodness, too. And what has happened to my strength, my faith in myself and man? It has crumbled gradually like an earth bank into a torpid river.

He left the forest and drove out between tall sugar cane, half cut, and bearded wheat that was not half grown. He had been pretending that he did not want to go to Bondha. Nor did he. But he also wanted very much to go. Once could not matter. He would say good-by, and take off for Ranipur tomorrow.

The Tanners' bungalow would be the big one at this side of the compound, white with a red roof and a red-walled garden. *Bara Sahib ki Koti,* big shot's joint with the best view, and others beyond, scaled strictly down the sugar-factory hierarchy. What an extraordinary feudalism pervaded this exasperating subcontinent, he thought; even the resthouses had senior and junior suites.

Young Michael was riding a pony round the garden, not a child's pony but an Arab of grace and quality, a chestnut gelding, about fourteen hands.

"Oh gosh," said Michael from his perch, "I thought you were never coming."

"That's a nice pony. What's his name?"

"Adonis. I'm allowed to ride him in the garden. He has a lovely mouth until he really gallops, and then he takes a hold."

"I came to tell you that I shot a tiger this morning early, but it was the wrong one. Hullo, Christian."

"A tiger! Gosh, tell me."

"Hullo, Harry." She was wearing a tweed coat and skirt. "You must have been out in that awful storm last night. There was the strangest gust of wind before. It blew over us like a scourge of whips. Look at my poor sweet peas. Michael, you've ridden enough now, haven't you?"

Harry helped the boy down. "Go home, Adonis," Michael said. "Adonis understands everything you tell him." The pony walked slowly round the bungalow. "Could you tell me about the tiger, please, Harry?"

He told Michael and Christian about last night, and about the

puzzle of the man-eater. "So I've decided to go to Ranipur," he concluded.

"Doesn't it wear you out," she said, "never knowing what lurks behind your back, and not enough sleep and so on?"

"It does tend to be an edgy performance."

He looked over the toy hills of Rimli to the mountains. Soon now the sunset would climb these lesser peaks, and the flush would grow and die. Soon now he would be off on his travels yet again.

"Here comes Mr. Hoopoe," Michael said. The bird flitted indecisively across the lawn and landed. The black-tipped crest flipped up and sank. It probed about the grass. "Mrs. Hoopoe stays in her nest in the garden wall. Such a nice mother bird with a bad smell, don't you think so, Harry?"

"Well," he said, "Mr. Hoopoe doesn't seem to mind."

Michael thought that vastly amusing. "Harry, why did the barn owl 'owl in the barn?"

"I give up," he said.

"Because the cuckoo drove 'er cuckoo. Now you ask me one."

"It's a family game Michael and I play," Christian said. "Darling, I don't think we'll play this game now. Ask Manoo Lall to put the drinks on the veranda, then please run over and tell Daddy Mr. Black is here."

"I won't say Mr. Black, I'll say Plain Harry like he said."

"I'm afraid he's rather spoiled. Do you think so, Harry?"

"I wouldn't know. He's very bright."

The half-moon was high now. The grinding of the sugar cane nearby groaned up and down and on and on with juiced monotony.

"Shall we go in?" she said. "Every time I look at Rimli I think of a horrible tiger's face, and I worry about Michael. But Desmond says it's safe here with all that open land between us."

"It is," he said. They walked in through the scent of sweet peas and syringa. The drink tray was on the veranda. He knew now how arrogant and foolish he had been even to imagine he might be too welcome here. He was glad that he had come. "I like that boy of yours," he said.

"It's astonishingly mutual. Have you any children, Harry?"

"We had a son. Lived a month." He poured out his drink.

"Your poor wife."

My poor wife. But Christian is right. Everything she says is right.

"We lost our little girl two years ago," Christian said. "It makes it so hard to understand why God — "

"I never understand why God," he said. "If any."

"I know," she said. "That's fairly obvious."

It was a long time since anyone had smote him coolly. People smote him in anger, or not at all. "I'm sorry about your child," he said.

"It was worst for Desmond. He's been quiet since the war, shut off in himself, I mean, and sorrow is so hard for him. Do you think Desmond is all right, Harry?"

"He's the same good kind chap and always will be."

"You know," said Christian, "it's a queer feeling for a wife, when a man steps out of the past and she knows he knows her husband better than she knows him after however long together."

"Yes," he said. "Ten years fly out the window. If you get to know a chap in dirty weather, you know him well enough for keeps."

"Desmond has missed you. Have you missed him?"

"Yes," he said. But he had not missed Desmond. All that he had missed was the feeling of missing him — or anyone or anything.

He had hoped to avoid a private conversation. But he would give her a chance to say her say. "I wanted to see him after the war. But there was the skeleton of a complication. . . ."

She smiled at him in her lively charming way. "The skeleton of a complication dead and buried long ago. Anyway, the complication never really happened, did it?"

"No," he said. "It never happened."

"Desmond and I are very happy, Harry."

"It's good to see," he said. "What's Desmond up to? I drive miles to see the man, and he closets himself in a sugar factory."

"It's labor trouble. Something about the company losing money last year and so we're not paying a workers' bonus this time but *they* say the accounts are phony. These labor headaches never seem to end. I get scared that someday some fanatic will hurt Desmond, but don't ever say I said so. What is it like in tea?"

"Worse, I think. Tea is a much longer-established industry, and some of those old-fashioned planters used to rule with a literal big stick. Naturally enough, when labor suddenly found its strength, it was bloody-minded. But I think that get-your-own-back stage is over. The trouble in the Darjeeling gardens is that the labor force is Nepalese, and the Nepalese are far more mercurial than your plains people. One of these agitators comes along, and before you know anything has started the place explodes. That was what happened to me."

"Go on."

"One day last autumn, I came to the factory to find all the hired help had downed tools and were being harangued outside the factory by a Communist. *Kill the red-faced plutocratic monkey!* he was screaming, meaning me. That provoked me, because I had always got on well with my people. So I took the agitator by the scruff of the neck, and threw him headfirst over the cliff at the edge of the road."

"Did you *kill* him?"

"No, some broken bones. The remarkable thing was that the moment he disappeared over the edge they were all right. But the managing director of my company, down in Calcutta, took a dim view, and the Tea Association said how can we possibly achieve good labor relations if planters take the law into their own hands. It wasn't what they thought privately, but it was what they had to say. The fact is there hasn't been any serious trouble in the district since."

"You believe in violence, don't you, Harry?"

"If you mean that it takes violence to deal with violence, yes."

"An eye for an eye," she said. Then, "I'm sorry, but you *do* seem so drastic and disillusioned. Was that incident why you gave up being a tea planter?"

"Ostensibly. The real reason the company eased me out was that I had been boozing my tea garden rapidly downhill."

"You don't look like a shaky booze artist. You don't behave like a reformed one, either — I mean, you can drink a little and then stop."

Michael reappeared. "Daddy's just coming."

"You'll stay for dinner, Harry, won't you?" Christian said.

"Many thanks. But I think I'd better be getting back."

Rising to take Michael off for his bath, she said, "Desmond will be so disappointed if you go. Can't you forget about that animal for one evening?"

"I can," he said. "I have, in fact. But I must make an early start tomorrow."

He considered the inconsequent talk of Christian Tanner, serenely happy with a handsome, good and rather simple husband and a boy the apple of her eye. He was jealous, but he wished them well. He thought, I'm the male animal. I can't sit unstirred by that golden woman in her tweeds. And she knows it, and it pleases her, but she isn't having any. Which is the difference between man and woman. But even if I were able, I would not play the cuckoo in this nest. I'm glad I came and found that out. . . . And here is Desmond.

"I'm frightfully sorry, old boy. I've been trying to persuade these hopeless union people. I don't believe they will strike in the end. Not a leg to stand on."

"Much anti-British feeling?"

"Antimanagement, not anti-British. Michael interrupted proceedings to announce the arrival of his hero, Plain Harry. You know, I wanted to ask you to be his godfather, but you hadn't answered my other letters, if you ever got them. So in the end I didn't."

"Desmond," he said. "I did get two." The hurt that must have caused had been in and out of his mind this past week. Now for a half truth. "I'm sorry I didn't write. I meant to, but things were slipping at that epoch. You know how it is."

Desmond smiled at him. "Of course I do."

Harry listened to the cricket song, the grinding of the cane, the voice of Michael beyond a door, the rubbery pad of servants in a well-ordered house. In the old days in India they made a different noise, barefooted.

Desmond said quietly: "It was good of you to go and see Christian that time in Canada."

Good of me! he thought. "I'd seen numerous prisoner-of-war wives in England. Why not Christian when I was over there?"

"I mean what you told her about my escape fiasco."

He supposed it had to come. "You stumbled over the trip wire. That's what I remember happening."

"No it isn't, Harry. And you know it. But what a wonderful bloody man you are. Let's have a drink."

He saw the relief in Desmond's face, the thing spoken out at last, the cancer borne so long and cut away. I could have helped him this way years ago, Harry thought. He was ashamed. "One more drink then," he said to cover up. "One more, and so on. That's been my trouble, except lately on this tiger job."

"Much?"

"A bottle a day for a year or two. Steady soaking."

"Wife trouble? You told Christian you were divorced."

"That started it, perhaps."

"I often think how lucky I am."

"You are," said Harry, "and so is Christian. *Schlanch!*"

"Skol!" It was their old toast in prison. Some of those prison days were the best days of his life, more real than any days before or since.

They discussed the man-eater situation. Then Desmond said: "If you're determined to go to Ranipur tomorrow, I've got an idea. I know a wizard place for shooting on that road, and the duck are in — pintail, mallard, teal. Why don't I bring the family along and we'll shoot duck in the morning and have a picnic lunch? Then you can go on to Ranipur. Meet at the resthouse say at seven. All right?"

Half a day would make no difference. "All right," he said. "Let's do that."

And here was Christian, changed for dinner. Desmond jumped up, clipped her round the waist and waltzed her down the veranda. "Wife," he said, "you're on a picnic at dawn tomorrow. Get cracking about food."

She stared at him. "Darling! What's got into you? You haven't done a thing like that to me for years."

"I know. But I haven't seen old Harry Black for years."

Christian Tanner smiled at Harry. *Thank you,* her eyes said, *for making him so happy.*

"Home for me," he said, and said good night to Michael in his bed, and went. He had done well for once.

Chapter Four

HARRY sat on the lip of the resthouse veranda, drinking tea. The sun was not yet above the Rimli hills; the sky was a good clear blue; the forest was a rain-washed green. It was the first Sunday in the month of February, and birds were singing. The grass tops before him swayed to a slow, eccentric passage. He supposed it would be a rootle-rootle busy pig.

He would like to hear the bell of a small church where he might go alone. *Come, Harry, my son, and I will tell you of peace and understanding.* But only his doom bells pealed this Sunday morning. *What is the point?* they said to him. *Why another journey on the road to nowhere?*

His first Sunday memories were of an Indian cantonment church, crammed with soldiers, where he went with his mother and his father, who would have been colonel — no, second in command — then.

The years as a boy, the years in the army before the war, the years as a planter since. They made nearly half his life. And there was an odd thing — that this free India was his much more than the India of the ruling days had been. The men waited round for baksheesh just as their forefathers had; but in theory there was a difference — they were now his fellow men. He could not tolerate the concept of a subject race.

"The baggage is loaded," said Cheddi Khan. "The men are waiting."

Harry stood up. His leg was giving him mild discomfort. He went to the front of the bungalow, where they waited below the neem, a graceful and useful tree, killing moths and curing sundry ills.

He owed nothing to the chokidar and sweeper, the man who

brought the wood, the carrier of water, the two forest guards, the boy who grazed his buffaloes by day. They knew this but they waited. They were lean and hungry men, and he was an anachronism in this land of the too-fat rich and the too-thin poor. It would be incomprehensible to them that, during a war, he had been hungry. This memory, however, made him a soft touch. This and the fact that he liked to be liked by humble people.

He paid them well. The water carrier asked for more, and was told fluently where he could go. The others laughed. He wished he could deal with himself as well as he could deal with them.

Gloom lay upon him. He looked about the Rimli enclave, a jigsaw of watercourse and forest; at parakeets, lemon-green in the early sun, flying so freely, crying so shrilly, of all birds the ones he liked most to watch, physical grace without complication. He looked up to the red rocks of Rimli. He did not want to leave this place. *Why go?* said the strong devil within him. *Why not give up this wild-goose tiger-chasing round to Ranipur, and stay near Bondha for a week or two? They want to see you.*

Cheddi Khan was at the car. Desmond, Christian and the boy would soon arrive. He had been so wrapped up in his useless self that he had not noticed Bapu's absence. "Where is Bapu?"

"Until now," said Cheddi Khan, "Bapu has not come."

Then he remembered he had told Bapu they would not leave until seven. It was not time yet.

He heard a sound. He swung instantly to listen. Could it be? The sound came from beyond that open place where he had thought a pig rootled. It was a high male jabber. "Rifles, Cheddi!" he called. He had heard this sound a good many times. Its tune was as unmistakable as "God Save the Queen." "Calamity" was its tune.

What lay over there? The Katha concession. The place where woodcutters axed tawny chips of khair wood, boiled them in pots, cooled the broth for khaki dye and used the enervated chips for fuel.

Several families lived there in shacks within a palisade of pointed stakes. With the gate shut it was undoubtedly tiger-proof. But the Kathas had to go down to the rao for water.

"Glasses, Cheddi!" He put up his binoculars. A good guess — they were Kathas, six men shouting as they ran.

Bapu? Where the devil was Bapu?

They were coming across the open place all anyhow, hugger-mugger. He distinguished a word in the torrent of words: *Mara.* Killed. They straggled up the rise, six men, including a well-built youth with a baby in his arms, a naked boy. The child howled; the men gabbled; the youth alone was silent, his heart fluttering the sleek skin of his chest.

"Be silent!" Harry commanded. He pointed his finger at the headman. "Speak, thou!"

The victim was the wife of the youth, mother of the baby. She had gone to the rao at break of day. She had not come back to feed her baby, and in a while her husband called because it was time for him to start the chipping of the khair wood. No answer.

They had found the place, and they had found the beginnings of the trail. But they had not followed. They had been afraid. How could they, defenseless, save her? They had come running for the sahib.

He was thinking in a hurry. He let the vociferous tide roll on. But, of a sudden, it stopped. The electric hush was as positive as the chatter had been. Bapu came running down the low ridge astride which the resthouse stood.

"Oh, sahib," he panted, "the Bad One is still at Rimli. I have found fresh tracks crossing from here to there." He made his graceful waving gesture across the upper forest.

The men all stared at Bapu. There was a curious quality of fear and fascination in their faces, as the rabbit might stare at the dancing weasel. Bapu had again been absent at a killing time.

"Oh, brother," Harry said with affection, "there is sorrow. The Bad One has killed a woman of the Katha people." He turned to the others. "I blame myself for this. If yesterday I had heeded the words of Bapu that the Bad One was still at Rimli, I might have saved the woman." Nonsense, chances thousands to one against. "Is this not so, Cheddi Khan?"

Cheddi Khan inclined his head. He had immense dignity. "It is so, Your Honor."

It was the best that Harry could do. They might be making a wicked shaitan out of Bapu, but he knew also that they made a fabulous figure out of Harry Black — the lame one, the one who made them laugh, the one whose curses sang. Yet again he felt that there was something up Bapu's tattered sleeve.

"Sahib, we must make haste," said Bapu.

Well spoken; this was the rare chance of being early on the scene. The girl had been killed at six, and it was now just seven.

Pin the brute down, that was the problem. "Which way would the Bad One go?" he asked, taking ammunition rounds from Cheddi Khan and slipping them into loops stitched in his shirt.

"I do not know, sahib. If it has gone on down to the plains, the chance is bad. If it has climbed up below the ridge, the chance is better."

"Cheddi! Give me the Barking Dogs."

Cheddi brought them. Barking Dogs were a sort of firecracker he had enjoyed as a schoolboy. They darted about the ground from bang to bang, wonderful spreaders of confusion and alarm. He had had some made for him by fireworks people in Calcutta, and had shown Bapu how to light the fuse and throw them. Bapu had been entranced.

The Tanner family now arrived in the sugar-factory Land-Rover. "Sorry if we're slightly late," said Desmond. "You know what women . . ." He took the situation in.

Harry thought: I hope he hasn't brought his rifle. This was not a reflection on Desmond Tanner, but simply that there were few men whose partnership Harry welcomed on these occasions. "I'm afraid you'll have to count me out of the duck shooting today," he said. "A woman has just been killed."

Young Michael's mouth fell open. Christian covered hers with her brown slim hand, staring at him.

Desmond was speaking. "The ducks can count me out as well, old boy. I brought my double rifle. I'll come along."

"Oh, darling, please don't go," Christian said.

"I'll do the job alone," said Harry. "I always do."

Desmond jumped out. He stood looking down at Harry. He was a good deal taller. "Come on, Harry," he said. "I'd like to."

"I tell you what would be a great help. Could you go to the Pass of Rimli and cover that?"

"The tiger would never cross by day."

"It did cross once by day."

"Yes, but a battalion of soldiers drove it. Look, Harry," said Desmond. "Let me come." He seemed cool and determined. But what he was saying was this: *Let me come, my friend. I must prove myself again to you.*

Here was a thing Harry could not deny to the man who was his friend. "All right," he said. "Have it your own way."

Desmond went for his rifle. Christian put her hand on Harry's arm, and said: "Please, Harry, couldn't you stop him? I've had the most awful hunchy feeling ever since I woke."

His mind worked fast, as always in emergency. He could not stop Desmond, and he could not explain why to Desmond's wife. "Look, Christian," he said. "I'm not old Desmond's keeper." Meaning it well, he said it roughly.

"No," she said. "You're not anybody's keeper. You use people to suit your domineering self."

"Many thanks," he said. He turned his back on her.

Cheddi and Bapu already sat in his Land-Rover with rifles. He could do with one more man. "Come with us, brother," he said to one of the forest guards, "and give us loving comfort."

They laughed immoderately at his little joke. He got in. Desmond sat beside him, and the door slammed with a tinny clank.

"Good luck, Plain Harry," said Michael. "And Daddy."

Harry raised his hand to Christian, who stood away. Her lips said something.

Up in Rimli forest, they went in single file. Harry first, Bapu, Cheddi, forest guard, Desmond. Soon they found indications that the tiger carried its victim by her waist. It had not stopped to feed. The trail ran fairly straight for the eastern horseshoe ridge, now only a hundred yards ahead. There the tiger would stop, or it would turn left in the direction of the pass, or it would turn down toward the plains.

They had come a mile or so from the car. The day was warming

up. Harry saw the woman's garment, a length of terra-cotta cotton, a pretty splash of color against green barsh bushes with white flowers. He stopped. The terra-cotta cloth had dark stains. The tiger had eaten a little here. This pursuit of the man-eater was a dirty, disgusting business that he hated. Yet he did it to assuage his inner demons, he supposed.

He saw that the tiger had gone left, up the ridge, where there was a possibility of forcing an encounter. He looked the others over now. Bapu and Cheddi Khan were all right. The forest guard was not: he had given half a dozen jittery warnings. You never could tell until you tried people out. Desmond looked fine, sweating a bit, but the atmosphere was sweaty.

"I think I remember this area," he said in Harry's ear. "If the tiger follows along the ridge, it comes to a dead-end ledge, doesn't it, where the ridge and a ravine come together?"

Harry nodded. "Yes, but there are several places where it can break out again first. What about this bag of wind? I'd better get rid of him, don't you think?"

"I would." They were the old firm again from days before.

"Climb this tree and watch," he told the forest guard. "Make no sound unless you see the tiger." The man's self-respect was spared. He shinned up without regard for his well-pressed khaki suit.

They went on: they must reach the tiger before the tiger finished eating. For a long way there had been no blood to follow. But there had been Bapu's uncanny skill. "Sahib," he whispered at last. "If the Bad One has not gone down into the nullah, the Bad One must be here."

Here it was: the classic case of a man-eater brought to bay, the perfect and inevitable climax. The ridge above them was now a vertical barrier leading up to the Pass of Rimli, a mile away and a thousand feet above. One impassable flank. The nullah curved in below them, twenty feet wide and deep, its walls sheer. It swung in to meet the ridge a hundred yards ahead. The tracks of the Rimli man-eater, and the occasional scuffing marks of its burden, led into this convergence of ravine and ridge, on a narrow ledge where bushes, rocks and grass were mixed with a few trees. The tiger

might have jumped on down into the ravine and gone farther, but Harry did not think so. He thought the tiger was hungry, that it was probably now feeding in the scrub on this ledge.

"If you're going to have Bapu throw some whiz-bangs, hadn't we better make sure first that it hasn't gone down into the ravine?" Desmond asked. "If it has, and it hears those things, we'll never get a second chance."

True. Desmond was always sound, providing the checks if not the inspiration. Which was why they had been so strong a team. He smiled at Desmond. "Okay, I'll go down there and see. Call if you see any movement. But whatever you do, don't shoot into that nullah. I don't want your bullets up my backside, Tanner."

Desmond guffawed, like his old self. "Let me go!"

Harry shook his head, and went down into the ravine. Careful, vulnerable, stalk along below the ledge. . . . Down from the ledge came the uninhibited sounds of a tiger at its meal.

He went back the way he had come. Bapu was looking up at the cliff face. "Sahib, I can climb up there. But a stone might fall."

"Kuch fikr nahin. It does not matter. Thou wilt not go till we are in position." He gave him three Barking Dogs and a box of matches. Bapu's hands did not shake at all.

The ledge where they stood was on two levels: an upper shelf running flat against the cliff, divided from the lower level by a drop of six feet or so. Both terraces ran up to join in the broken scrub where Harry now knew the tiger lay.

He said, in Hindustani, "Now here's the plan. Tanner Sahib and I will go forward together. He will stand at that tall rock and guard the higher level of the ledge. I will stand close above the ravine, and I will guard the lower level and the ravine. Cheddi Khan, if he is not too fat, will climb this tree."

"Sahib, I can climb this or any tree, but I will come forward with you." Cheddi Khan was not amused.

"I have given the order."

"Sahib, it is my pride always to hold the small gun at your side."

He gave way to Cheddi Khan. He might need the three-eighteen.

"Look, Desmond, don't fire too soon. It will be forty yards from us when it first breaks out. Wait. Above all, don't fire unless it's

going to stay on the upper level." He was putting Desmond in the most unlikely place, in the lee of a rock. He was doing as well as he could by Desmond, and by Desmond's wife.

"Bapu, drop the Barking Dog close below thee at the bottom of the cliff. Do not throw. Is it understood?"

He and Desmond and Cheddi Khan went forward toward the tiger. He put Desmond into place. Old Desmond was all right, jaw muscles flexing as they used to. He was glad that Desmond had come along.

He went down with Cheddi to his own place above the wall of the ravine. He put Cheddi into a cleft of rock beside him, ready to change rifles in an emergency.

A brilliant but intransigent officer, they had said in his Staff College report.

Harry raised his hand. He did not watch Bapu clamber up the face of the ridge. He looked straight ahead. If the Bad One saw Bapu, it might break out before any persuasion of Barking Dogs.

Now he saw Bapu, goating it along a ledge. The air was so still that Harry heard the sizzle of the match. The toss of a hand, the feather of smoke over and down in parabola. The Barking Dog went off. It flew up and over, clear to the ravine side of the ledge, reached ground, harried back — bang, bang and pester toward the cliff where Bapu stood.

Wrong place, very bad. As the Barking Dog stopped barking, Harry's bells of doom pealed loudly.

Bapu called, and Harry saw the tiger's head. It was making for him diagonally from the upper level. It was coming down, as he had thought it would, breaking fast, but not charging. Good, after all.

But Desmond fired from his rock above. A miss. Too long a shot — precisely what Harry told him not to do. The tiger switched direction toward Desmond and went into a full gallop, into a charge. A second shot crashed, but the tiger did not falter as it moved into a patch of scrub.

He knew that Desmond could not reload.

"Round the rock, Desmond!" he shouted, and kept on shouting. "Round the rock!"

Desmond ducked to Harry's side of the rock.

Harry was shouting now at the tiger. He saw it for too small a fraction of a second to get in a shot. It spun round as it reached the rock. He had captured its attention. It saw him. Desmond had skipped back to the other side.

The tiger's face and jaws were in a sanguinary mess, he noticed as it sprang down for him. He fired twice blindly into the heaving scrub, and the tiger came. . . .

Chapter Five

CALCUTTA: 1938

The Battalion was sailing homeward in a fortnight. They had managed to win their last polo tournament in India, which meant the last tournament of their Colonel's long polo-playing life. Harry's team included Rabat, Jumbo Cotter and the Colonel himself, all from the Regiment except Rabat, who was Indian Army but temporarily attached to them. Rabat was a Rajput and a fine player.

After the last chukker, there was the falling coolness of a January evening in Calcutta. Harry was thirsty, sweated clean and tired, and this afternoon was over, but tonight, tomorrow, all the promise of the world was golden. He drank fresh lime. He fed coarse sugar to Abdul and his other pony. He walked along to speak to the Colonel.

The Colonel's face and neck were vivid as a monsoon sunset. His mustaches bristled out and up in affable ferocity. "I'm dining at the club," he said. "D'you want to come?"

"That's kind of you," said Harry. "But I'm afraid I'm going to Firpo's with Jumbo and Rabat — also Desmond Tanner, a civilian. Do you know him?"

"Yes, a nice boy."

"You wouldn't like to come, sir, I suppose?" For the Lord's sake don't, he thought.

"Certainly not," the Colonel said. "You have a celebrating air about you. Watch your step now. Understand me, Harry?"

"Yessir. The four of us are dining quietly."

"All the more chance of getting into mischief." The Colonel turned away. "Get out!" he said. The Colonel ruled the Battalion with irascible benevolence.

Firpo's cabaret was crowded. There were jugglers. There was also dancing. Jumbo Cotter took the magnum of champagne from the bucket, filled his glass and passed it on. "Soon I must lose my elephants," he said. A tear rolled down each cheek. "How I love those beasts of mine."

"I know how you feel, Jumbo," Harry said. "But Rabat and Desmond haven't heard about your elephants. Could you bear to tell them?"

Jumbo wiped his eyes. He was a large-boned officer, and fat. He overflowed his chair. "You are aware, of course, that I hold the appointment of Aide-de-Camp to a Personage. My Personage loves his little joke. My great qualities — my *bodily* great qualities — have been his not-so-little joke. The very first day he saw me he turned to the Military Secretary and said: *Jumbo will be my ADC in charge of elephants.* Now my term of office has expired. I must lose my elephants. And I love my elephants," Jumbo added simply.

"How many elephants have you got?"

"Under my care at present I have two. They are my very special Loved-ones."

"Where are they, Jumbo?"

"At the palace of the elephants. Where else, nincompoop?"

"If we stay here any longer, the jugglers will come on again. Could we make a pilgrimage to the palace of the elephants?"

Jumbo finished up the magnum. "Why not?" he said.

They paid and went downstairs and onto Chowringhee road to the cars. Desmond took Jumbo; Rabat rode with Harry. Harry sang "Night and Day" for the benefit of late passers-by who stared at him and Rabat in the open car. Some of the Indians attached to British regiments were complete flops, but Rabat had become a sort of regimental pet. Mr. Rabbit, the troops called him with affection, and would follow him.

"This Jumbo," Rabat said now. "He is new type of Englishman

to me, and very funny. He is sad about his elephants, and I am sad about my British friends I soon must lose."

Harry laughed. You sometimes forgot Rabat was an Indian. Or you remembered, wishing all Indians were like Rabat.

"Will you miss your India?" Rabat said the "your" with a little hint of a Hindu edge, suddenly, for the first time.

"Polo, shooting and Mr. Rabbit, yes, of course." But Harry did not think he would miss India very much. There were new things, places, people to enjoy, with the Regiment, wherever it might go.

"I tell you one thing, Harry," Rabat said. "This year with the Battalion has been strange for me. Into Saturday Club and Bengal Club I am not allowed, but with you people I have been a very special Wog belonging to the family."

"Woggy, wog!" Harry said. "Come off it, Rabat. You've had too much champagne."

"No, Harry, it is just that I have seen the English as Indians do not see them, and now I am rather English too, so what am I?"

"I don't quite understand." He did, in fact.

"I am not sure of myself really as Indian at heart, and so I must be not belonging to anybody quite, and not agreeing with my emancipated sister who hates all English guts."

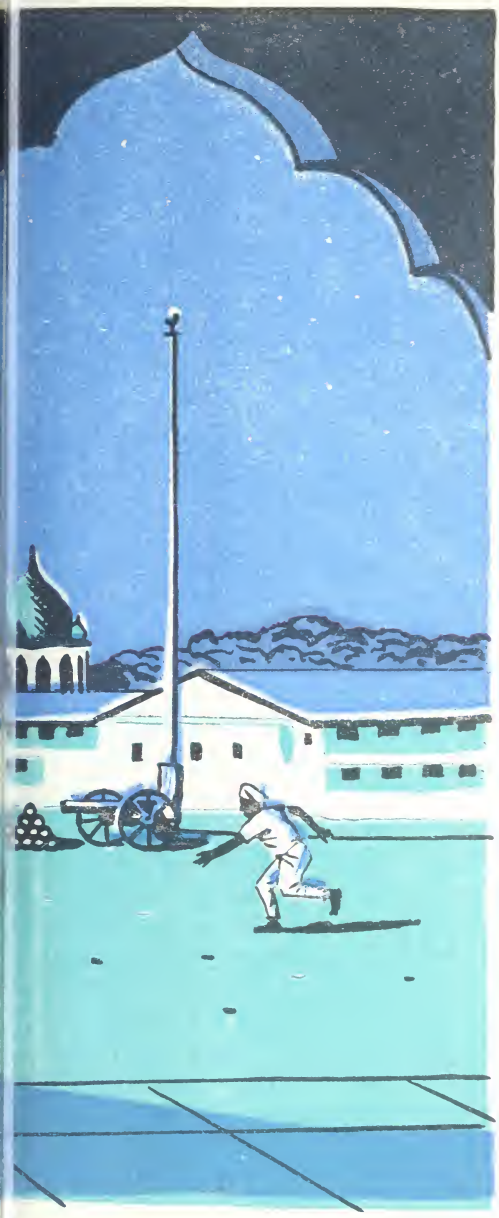
"Does she? Why? Are we so awful?"

Rabat rolled about the seat with laughter. "Awfully wonderful! Particularly British Army people. India is what you call your oyster for fun and games, and you don't bother to pretend that you want us to have self-rule. I like that very much."

"But surely they want you to have self-rule — eventually."

"That we do not believe. Now you are thinking: *What a bore old Rabat is.* Well, I am boring this once to you because you are the one who took me under wing from the first day, and I thank you sadly for appalling fate of almost understanding British point of view." Rabat laughed again. He laughed in hilarious waves, which was one of the numerous endearing things about him.

They arrived at the elephant lines. Jumbo led the way into the presence of his Loved-ones, which stood awake, while their mahouts slept beside them. "Mohammed! Ali! Stir your bones!" he boomed in English.



The mahouts were instantly awake. They made obeisance to Jumbo. The elephants stirred too; their shackles clanked; and, at command, they saluted him with trunks.

"Salaam, my noble Akbar. Salaam, my bonny Mumtaz. Akbar and Mumtaz, may I present, first, Desmond Tanner, a commercial gent. He is the lanky creature with the snow-white pantaloons. Next I offer Second Lieutenant Rabat, a countryman of yours. Lastly a worthless harum-scarum type, Harry Black. Ali! Mohammed! Bring me sweetmeats."

Jumbo fed them balls of sugar wrapped in hay. He boomed low endearments. His elephants quite evidently liked him too.

Harry said: "The night is balmy and the moon is full. How about a ride on one of your Loved-ones round the Maidan?"

"A capital notion, Harry! A last night together, a dignified farewell. Ali, it is the order of my Personage that Mumtaz have night exercise." Ali looked dubious, but

he hovered before Jumbo with respect and humility. "Ali, the howdah. Quick now!"

They rode across flat open ground. To one side were river lights, the noises of ships, the Fort; to the other, Chowringhee with its lamps, its lighted buildings, its late traffic; here the cool glimmer of a January moon about the Maidan and the shadowed trees; the creaking of the howdah, the swaying gait of Mumtaz, and Ali in his turban on her neck.

A policeman stepped forward from the darkness of a tree. He held his hand up, as if to halt traffic.

"Greetings, Inspector," Jumbo said. "How are you?"

The policeman walked round Mumtaz. He was a watchful, and tactful, Anglo-Indian. "What is it you are doing?" he began to Jumbo, adding as insurance, "sir?"

Jumbo waved his hand about the empty Maidan. "Night school for my elephant," he said. "What better place than this? Mumtaz, say salaam to the Inspector."

The man smiled. "Now look, sir, you make one chukker round the trees and back you go, but please not on the streets, sir, or there will be trouble. I'm getting out of here before I see you." He saluted and rode his bicycle away.

"A charming fellow," Jumbo said, en route again.

"Jumbo, what would you say to a detour down the Lane and a fleeting call at Number One-three-eight?" Harry asked.

There were no objections. It was an excellent moon-mad idea. "Let us herald our coming with a song," Jumbo said. "I know: 'The Volga Boatmen.' The words elude me, but it is the melody that matters. Do you know 'The Volga Boatmen,' Rabat?"

"I can sing anything like nightingale."

They sang sadly and loudly down the Lane. An audience appeared at doors and windows, and some began to sing, and soon the whole shady Lane was filled with that most melancholy air in time to the ponderous-footed Mumtaz. Jumbo was crying as they arrived at the very dubious little night club called One-three-eight.

Mumtaz knelt and they slid off. "Wait here, Ali," Jumbo ordered.

Cora, the owner, met them at the door. "Hullo, boys," she said,

jolly and hospitable. "We've never had an elephant before." But she looked at Rabat. "This place is for Europeans. I am sorry."

"Don't be awkward, Cora," Harry said. "Just a nightcap for Jumbo's bleeding heart."

"I am sorry," Cora said with firmness. "It is our rule."

"I don't mind," said Rabat. "I'll stay outside."

"No, you won't. You're coming in with us."

"Quite right, Harry. A point of principle." Jumbo lurked behind. "Lead us, Black."

Cora whispered, "Please, Harry."

"Sorry, Cora. Come on, Rabat. Inside."

Inside, at the first table, were three gentlemen in their cups, sitting with girls in evening dresses. The girls were multi-hued, which made this color question interesting, thought Harry.

"A Wog," the first sahib said, outraged.

"A muckin' Wog," said the second.

"Put him outa here," the third sahib said.

"Just apologize," Harry said. "Say you're sorry for being rude."

Apologies were not forthcoming. The girls piled into corners and there was much screaming. Harry and Desmond were engaged. Rabat hovered in embarrassment. Jumbo laughed himself to a vast jelly. Then he took one sahib in each hand, bumped heads, twisted collars, cried: "This hurts me far worse than you, my braw laddies." Jumbo cast them out. The third capitulated. The area around them was a shambles.

Jumbo returned from expelling the sahibs. "The police are outside," he hissed. "They are arresting Mumtaz for obstruction of this public lane. They threaten us with breaches of a dozen different kinds of peace."

Some senior sort of policeman entered. "Names, please," he said unpleasantly.

NEXT MORNING the Adjutant's runner came to Harry with a note: *You will report to the Colonel at once.*

The Colonel was a killer. Harry stared at the whitewashed wall above the Colonel's head while the storm beat him to bewilderment. "Military Secretary himself phoned" — *(What about poor*

Jumbo, what would they do to him?) — "Leading an Indian officer into trouble" — "Battalion's reputation, unsavory haunts, disgraced the Regiment" — *(Oh Lord)* — "Repeated warnings, irresponsible young hooligan" — Thunder to a silence. ". . . Answer me! Stop staring at the wall."

"I'm sorry, sir." He looked down at his Colonel's blue eyes.

"I asked you if you have considered what your father will feel when he hears about this? Or do you find that funny?"

Harry shook his head. The evening had been very funny; it did not seem very funny now. "No, sir," he said.

"You wonder why I'm hard on you. First, because your father is a friend of mine. Second, because your family have served the Regiment for a hundred years or more, and served us well. Third, because I believe you have great gifts as a soldier and a man. You work hard when you work. You go hard when you play. You demand a lot from the troops and get it, and they like you. You are highly intelligent, and you arrive at the essence of problems with a ruthless dispatch and certainty which is very rare indeed." The Colonel paused. The Colonel never paid compliments. It was ominous.

"One of your troubles is that life is easy. You are too fearless, too popular with men and women, too natural a leader, too quick-witted. Nothing has ever been difficult for you in your life. You seem modest, but are in fact arrogant and self-centered. I know what I am talking about because you and I are much alike. I remember your father saying once when we were subalterns: *You would be a better chap if things came harder to you, if you failed occasionally.*

"Well, I had some money. I could afford to enjoy myself and look down my nose at the ambitious plodders; and when the war came, I did well enough. But after the war I would probably have gone merrily to hell, except for one thing — you know what that was."

"The Regiment, you mean, sir?"

"Yes. When the next war comes, which it will, you will either be killed or you will do well. And if you do really well, you may become ambitious. But if you survive and don't get ambition, then I think you will go to pot. Why? Because you are too arrogant to

subordinate yourself, I mean to give yourself, to the Regiment or to any institution or belief.

"Where you fail, my dear boy, is that you think the world is a pleasure ground set aside for the particular selfish benefit of Harry Black. But when the pleasure palls, what then?"

Harry said nothing. The Colonel seemed to him to be talking a lot of remote and highfalutin stuff.

"You had five days' leave coming. What were you going to do?"

Had. Were. "I was going after a tiger that's been giving trouble in the Sunderbunds, sir."

"Another hell-raiser. Well, you're not. You are orderly officer from now until the day we leave."

"Yes, sir. I'm sorry about last night."

"High spirits are one thing," said his Colonel. "Riding a State elephant to a fracas at One-three-eight is quite another. However, I suppose it will give them something to remember us by in this benighted city. Now you had better tell me all about last night."

Chapter Six

GERMANY: 1943 • Oflag VIIY

THE TEN MEN of Number Four team went up the ladder and over the bridge and dropped down through at the far end. The prison recreation hut creaked and shook to a wood-thumped thunder: up, hold, cross, drop.

"Thirty-seven seconds," said Desmond, with the watch.

"Not bad," Harry said. "But, Jim, you were slow to the bridge. You're still not crowding the chap in front enough." In this escape scheme speed was the prime consideration. "Well, pack up now."

They dismantled the scaling ladder, dismantled the wooden bridge they would use to cross the fence wire, and camouflaged the parts as shelves; the newspapers and music sheets were quickly put back in place. Once more this was the camp music room with a piano, with two music-draped wires stretched from beam to beam, simulating the double fence around Oflag VIIY.

Harry was glad that the last practice was safely over. He had

lived for three years now from climax to anticlimax, from real alarm to false, from half-success to failure.

"Well done, boys," he said to Number Four team. They stuffed their home-stitched packs inside battle-dress blouses. They were tall and short, broad and narrow, lean and young and wonderful. "Night, Harry," they said, departing casually by ones and twos, masters of their wary art.

"Thank you, Dug," he said to the head of the camp stooging system, which watched the guards. It had been a good evening: only one German visit to the sing-song in the music room.

He went outside with Desmond. He and Desmond were in Number Two team. It was August: escaping weather. People walked by the wire fence, lay about, threw footballs.

"I must check the detail for tomorrow," Desmond said. "I'd better stay up late."

"There's no need, Desmond. You've worked it out to the last nail already. What you want is sleep." As supply man, Desmond was showing the pessimistic fussiness of strain. It's my fault too, Harry thought. I drive him, and he's such a truly goodhearted chap, no vices at all. "Any letters?" he asked as a change of subject.

"Not for three weeks. It's frightful, you know, Harry, but I've hardly had time to think about Christian lately."

He had a winner of a wife, a driver in London in the Blitz, a humdinger of a looker; the sort of amusing, kind girl Harry admitted might exist though he had never met one. Christian's photograph hung on the wall beside Desmond's bunk. He was the only married one among them, as it happened, and the four bachelor members of the mess felt that she was theirs through him in small degree. So Christian sat disembodied on a sentimental pedestal of Woman.

Home in J hut, Harry climbed into his upper bunk and under one blanket. The air-raid sirens sounded. There was Desmond, lighting his fat-burning lamp underneath; conscientious, work-haunted. The time was set for a week from tonight. The first cloudy night after that. Harry wondered if the scheme would work. Of course it was going to work. He turned the other way and fell instantly asleep.

The second morning after that there was a search at the north side of the camp, a tunnel found and some escape kit. That was bad: it meant the Germans were alert; it made the pre-escape temperature a little warmer.

"Look, boys," Harry said to his team, "four of our people lost stuff this morning. I think we'll store the packs in J hut too."

"But they'll probably search it tomorrow."

"They searched it last week," Harry said. "Odds are against another search, with thirty huts to check. We must gamble big."

On the second evening they stored the packs, civilian clothes, maps and passes. It's a good big gamble, Harry thought. Well, if I'm wrong, I'm wrong.

On the third morning, old peasants, Russian prisoners and deported women began to cut rye on the south flank of the camp. They gathered the sheaves into tall shocks. Half the camp turned out to watch the women, to think about the harvest fields of childhood, to watch the fluidity of woman on the move. Harry had not addressed a woman for three years.

On the fourth evening, the moon did not rise till ten o'clock: a waning but still potent moon. Clouds followed its rising. Next day, a wind blustered from the east, and clouds were low. Harry lay on his bunk all morning, reading. "Is it all off, then?" someone asked. — "No, we're ready." — "So you just take things easy. What a cool cucumber you are."

The plans were complete at last, everything ready and hidden in a false partition. Harry and Desmond walked by the barbed wire, part of a long procession of prisoners.

"I wish the harvest had been a week later," Desmond said in a muted voice. "That rye was wizard cover."

"It's easier running now. And the sheaves are the height of men. We can jig about between them. No, I think it's better."

"I don't," Desmond said, "not with the darkness we can expect this month. I mean I wonder if we aren't shaving the chances a bit close." He looked round at Harry and away.

"It's going to be all right," Harry said gently. "We won't do the job unless it is. Don't worry, chum."

Two nights from now the moon would rise at ten fifty-three,

and that was the first possible night. He would not say anything ahead of time to Desmond. He did not want to bring things nearer to him than they had to be.

"I had a letter from Christian at long last," Desmond said. "Three weeks from door to door, which isn't bad. She's going back to Canada, I think, from various hints."

"Oh, I'm glad," Harry said. "How did she sound?"

"In cracking form, as usual."

He had never heard of her in anything but cracking form.

"She sent messages to the boys. Wait, I'll read it, just a sentence. Here we are. 'Remember me to the people in the mess. I feel I know them well by now, at least I know Tommy and Jack and Simon but Harry your real friend remains an enigma like a mixture of Al Capone and Good-time Charlie and Sir Galahad don't repeat this."

Harry laughed so loudly that people near them turned to see. They were reaching the end of a second lap round the wire. They must have walked nearly a thousand miles together in step at four miles an hour this summer to a lean-teamed fitness they might never know again.

Now, an unusual thing occurred: the line of prisoners wavered and stopped. Fast as the wind the ripple ran up to them: "CAMP MOVES TONIGHT." A scramble of details: *"Pack at once. Take only what we can carry. . . . Heavy stuff to follow. . . ."* And so on.

Harry looked south to J hut, to the rusty tangled barrier of wire, to woods where the guards lurked by night. "Desmond!" he said. "Find somebody in each of the four teams. I'm going to the SBO. I want you, the leaders and Willie at the football field at once."

Willie was the coolest fish in Christendom. He had once cut through the wire alone and had walked a hundred and sixty miles, only to be caught on the Swiss frontier. Harry had chosen him to be the nonplaying manager of this escape.

He walked at an ordinary pace to see the Senior British Officer. If he ran, so would the word run: *Harry's up to something.*

"So THAT's the situation," he said to his thirty-nine fellow would-be escapees. "The last traces of daylight won't fade tonight before

the first effects of the moon are showing from under the horizon. But if the cloud cover is very thick, it may be dark enough to have a go."

Now here was the tricky part: "The SBO has agreed to the scheme." What he had actually said was: *This thing gives me the willies. I don't believe in it, but I do respect your judgment, Harry.* "I want to say one thing: every individual is going to decide this for himself."

"One question, Harry. Are you on yourself?"

"Yes," he said. Stupid question.

"In that case I'm on too."

He looked down in the medley of voices. Then he looked at their faces one by one. He hoped he would do right for these people. He smiled. "Good," he said. "That's that, then."

Desmond and Harry had drawn numbers three and four on Two team. Harry took his team leader, Bill, aside. "Look, Bill," he said. "Move me back to tenth. This thing is going to need watching to the last second. But leave Desmond where he is."

"Put me ninth." Desmond's face was fine-drawn. His jaw muscles flexed as they often did now.

"No, Desmond. Stay in your proper place. I'll easily pick you up outside."

"Listen, Harry, we're partners in this thing. I'm going ninth." He was a selfless chap, not strong-willed, but a stone wall of obstinacy on occasion.

Harry had to go last. But why should Desmond's chance be spoiled? He could not act the dictator, though. "Have it your own way," he said.

He crossed from J to K hut and went in. He could just make them out, Three and Four teams sitting on benches. Their faces and hands were blackened. "All set, boys?"

"All set, Harry."

"It's dark as Erebus," he said. "Much better than I hoped for. May start raining; ladders slippy; watch for that. And remember — if Willie shouts *Stop,* get back to the huts quick and no nonsense. Understand?"

They understood. "Good luck, Harry." He went to the door. Someone whispered, "Did you hear that he's put himself last on Two team? What a chap!"

He was flattered by that. But he had to change his place, and Desmond did not have to, and Desmond would get no credit.

He went outside, and looked at the lamplit wire, blackness beyond, which was contrast, not real darkness. He had said *Dark as Erebus* to encourage the troops.

"Diversions ready," Willie said behind K hut. "Ready to short-circuit lights. Right sentry standing Red." That was code for the dangerous positions. "Left sentry Green moving Green."

"What do you think, Willie?"

They turned in from the wire. There was one place they could measure darkness — in the dead angle of two huts nearby. Harry watched. Time, 9:49. He could see the man he had posted as a test for visibility at twenty yards. He could not see the man at thirty. Bloody searchlight now, sweeping a roof of cloud and down.

"It's a tossup, Harry. I'm not sure." Willie's face was blackened too.

Harry said, "We'll have a go if it holds like this."

The wind had died. A few spits of rain gleamed down. The camp was a busy hive of people packing in the distance.

"Left and Right stopped Red, talking." Which meant that the sentries had met between J and K huts.

Now the forty escapers waited; and their hundred helpers waited; and the reluctant SBO, who was responsible for these madmen, waited. Everyone waited while Left sentry and Right sentry still gossiped at 9:57.

And now they moved at last. Right sentry to the right, Left sentry to the left, diverging to what in sixty yards would be a double Green. Time, one minute past ten. Now the chance was coming, if ever a chance would come. Harry kept his eyes open and put his hands tightly over his eyes.

"What's he doing?" Shocked whisper. "Seen chaps pray like that before. Harry's nerve cracked?"

"Don't be silly," said Willie. "He's shutting out the light to see better afterward."

But Harry also prayed to the God he reserved for emergency. Oh God, he prayed. Give me strength to do this right.

"Left sentry Red, moving Green. Right sentry stopped Red."

He took his hands away. He made the final decision.

"Meierling, underofficer, ten guards, just come in West gate. Looks like business — coming down to Three Battalion, marching."

"Riot Squad!" said Willie. Time for the diversions.

Harry knew how Meierling and his posse must come — by a path running diagonally down the steep bank toward them. Say two minutes at a walk, much less at the double. But the Riot Squad would distract Meierling, if he did not smell a rat.

"My pack," he said, and somebody held it for him. Shoulder straps on, waist belt tightened.

"Left sentry Green, moving Green. Right sentry stopped Red. Now Red moving Green."

"Sentry relief has just left guardroom." It would take four or five minutes for the relief to get here. A steady, quiet drizzle now. It was four minutes past ten.

"Left sentry Green, moving Green. Right sentry Green, moving Green."

He heard German screams. The Riot Squad had gone into action.

"Short the lights," he said. He covered his eyes again.

The message went by light, by a small bulb in a long cylinder of cardboard, aimed like a rifle at the face of one watcher in the cobbler's shop, where you could short the lights for the whole camp.

"Lights out," said Willie.

Now. Harry took his hands from his eyes. He heard more diversions going in. He was grateful to all those people who were taking risks to protect the escape — mock ladders up; grapnels in the wire, twanging rattles to right and left. The four escape teams were running out now: a scuffle of ladders through the doors, a thump of rubber-shod feet on wooden steps. And now a German voice was shouting confusing orders at each diversion point: "Escape attempt!" "Stand there, fool!" "Here, Feldwebel Müller!" "Do not move, damned dumbhead." It was Meierling, the Nazi

security officer, to the life. The men in the diversion teams had practiced him these last two months.

Now four escape teams wheeled their ladders into line abreast. The front men on each ladder crossed the trip wire, six feet inside the main fence. Nobody stumbled. Harry saw the four ladders go up against the main fence, heard the anchoring spikes kicked in. He saw the first men on the ladders, heard the sliding out of the bridges to cover the double fence, heard the locking sockets click bridges to ladders. It was working, this fantastic scheme.

The diversions still flourished to right and left. Shots. He saw Desmond's lankiness moving ahead of him. Time to go. He ran forward.

Something wrong on One ladder. He heard sentries shout, and he heard and saw flashing shots. But the humpbacked shadows went on up and over, except on One team, where the bridge had broken away from the ladder. The rest of One team was coming back.

Six men up on his ladder; Seven at the bottom. Shots closing, crack in his left ear. Seven up, Eight at the bottom. It's getting very hot. Ricochet — *Whee-ee-ow-oh.* No machine guns yet. Nobody hit yet, I think. Jabber jabber of frenzied Germans.

Eight up. Desmond at the bottom. Shot. Shot. Coming nearer. He's not going. "Go on, Desmond!"

But Desmond turned and broke back for the barracks past Harry. He stumbled over the trip wire, picked himself up and ran just as Willie shouted: "Stop!"

When Willie says "Stop!" get back out of it quick, Harry had said to the others. But he broke the discipline that he had demanded. He went on.

"STOP, HARRY!"

The uproar was lessening as he climbed the ladder. Now he was on the bridge over the fences, with the nightmarish barbed tangles beneath him; now at the dropping-off place beyond the wire, and a sentry capering about below. Harry saw the man's terrified face, and the rifle. He landed on top of the German sentry and broke his fall. The sentry had had it, wasn't even trying to hold him. *"Tut mir leid,"* Harry grunted politely. "I'm sorry."

He got up and ran, and the other sentry fired wide, and here was a man, dodge. No, it was a harvest shock.

Time? he wondered. He was very tired. Forty seconds from the launching, he thought. How many got out? Twenty-five, or thereabouts. He heard cries ahead, pistol shots behind him. He headed southeast toward the edge of the woods.

And he thought: That was the best thing in my life. If I lived a hundred lives, nothing could ever match it.

But he had no Desmond to share the thought with. Desmond had given up his easy place, and then he had failed to make it.

Harry's ears still sang. It was raining now a little. He walked at a lone man's pace. The lone man's journey had just begun.

Chapter Seven

CANADA: 1944

He stood at the back of the train on an open platform where a warm wind blew engine fumes and the scent of the Canadian woods, and he watched the woods fall away behind. They were a dishevelment of stump and slash and second growth. He would have liked to see them in the beginning, before the plunder.

The platform jostled. His stump started to nag again with the shaking and the standing, so he went inside the coach and sat down with his legs up to look at invasion pictures in *Life* magazine.

As a prize escaped POW, he had been lecturing at Army camps and Air Force stations and to Canadian clubs for a month. The crowds bothered him, but a couple of big slugs of gin got him over that. And people's warmth and faith and love of life sustained him.

He looked at *Life* and wondered how Desmond was getting on at the new prison camp. He wished that he could see old Desmond. He wished that he did not have to see old Desmond's wife and say the things he had said so many times to wives or relations. *Arthur Hopkins. I did know him.* (Now who on earth was he?) *I brought a photo, just in case* — (Got him, thank God. A dreary chap.) *Of*

course I know Arthur. He was very well and cheerful last summer.

Harry was restless. He had done nothing but travel and talk and meet and eat and drink this past month after ten months of fretting in hospitals in Switzerland and England, and having his tin leg fitted, and practicing with that. Turned down now for war, and peace not wanted or expected in a world of war. But what had happened to his freedom dream?

The train ran through the woods again — the pine, the spruce, the canoe birches. It rambled out of woods to the sea on one side and woods on the other, and stopped at its destination in the afternoon.

"I'll take your bag," the conductor said.

He found fifty cents, but the conductor said, "Not from that chest of medals, Colonel. Thanks just the same." The man took down the suitcase. "Well now, Christian, how's my girl?"

"Fine, Mr. Wolseley. Harry! So you really came. Mr. Wolseley, this is Colonel Black, who was in Germany with my husband."

"I guessed it would be, from the pictures in the papers."

Harry shook hands with Mr. Wolseley. He and Desmond's wife walked over to the car. "I like that chap," he said.

"He's been our conductor ever since I was a child. He's sweet."

Harry smiled at the woman's word for a man, and he got into the car beside her, and she drove off. He watched her hands on the steering wheel. "We live two miles outside the town," she said.

They turned off a main road, and here were the slaughtered woods again. "You must think them so disappointing and untidy. I noticed that when I came back to Canada last year."

"Yes," he said. "I would love to see the big old Indian woods."

"There are places with virgin forest still. You must be exhausted, Harry. How's your leg?"

"It's been a bit of a nuisance lately, off and on. Neuroma, they call it, something to do with the nerve ends. I'm going to have it fixed up when I get home." He wanted to talk about Desmond, not his leg. "Any letters?"

"The last I had was dated June the second. They take such ages, but I suppose it's the invasion. He sent you messages."

"Anything special?"

"No. Just wondering how you were. He was so pleased and proud of you about the escape, but he misses you dreadfully, and this last year I think it's been much harder for him without you to help him and make him laugh."

Poor Desmond, who didn't make it. "I miss him too."

"Here we are," she said, and turned into a drive. "My father and mother are longing to meet you."

"Come along, dear. It's time for bed, and I know Christian has a thousand things to ask the Colonel."

Plump Mr. Foley and dowager Mrs. Foley went to bed.

"Are you tired, Harry?"

"Not a bit," he said.

"Shall we sit out, then, for a while?"

They went outside. The tide had turned, he thought, from damp glistenings on rock. Gulls lamented. The moon made a shimmer path from yonder on the bay. He heard voices in an upstairs room. He liked her parents.

Harry and Christian watched the sea. "Was the moon like this the night you did it?"

"Same size of moon," he said, "but a thick drizzly night, and darkish." He hoped she would not ask about all that yet.

"Just one moon-year ago. It must seem a century to you."

"Sometimes it does," he said. "Sometimes it seems much nearer than anything that's happened since."

"What was the worst thing at camp, Harry?"

"For everyone a ton of prisondom without end. Otherwise, different things for different people. For me I think it was the crowding, no privacy I mean. We were lucky, comparatively speaking. I'm sure there is a point in hunger or in fear beyond which people become plain animal. We were hungry sometimes, but not starving. We were just human beings in adversity and full of weakness, but I know that I saw nobility in those human beings, a spark."

"Of God?"

"You could call it that."

"I remember the same in London in the Blitz. People were wonderfully unselfish and wonderfully brave."

He thought how much more this girl had seen and done than he had seen and done for his M.C. and his D.S.O. "That was adversity," he said.

"Are you disappointed in freedom, Harry?" She turned to look at him. She had a beautiful face.

"I'm a fool," he said. "I thought I had life worked out, but free life isn't quite the simple sausage that I thought."

"But it's a lovely thing to know that Desmond's friend came out of prison believing more in human beings."

His stump jabbed at him. Go away, you, he told it. "It's good to find a bit of peace. The sea and the forest and the summer night. What do those moonstruck gulls keep carrying on about?"

"They fly up with clams and drop them to break on rock. Could you tell me just a bit about the camp?" It was odd how people said "the camp": POWs said, "in prison," or "in the bag," or "in the shaft."

He tried to talk about that other life, which was more real to him than life before or since, than sitting here with Christian Tanner in the ebb of moon and tide three thousand miles away. He told her the truth, with a few reservations.

"I believe you miss it in a kind of way," she said.

"Life down to essentials, with one purpose and a meaning. Yes, I do."

"You help me so much, talking about it," Christian said. "Tell me, do you sometimes dream about it still?"

"Most nights, I think." On the nights I sleep, he said to himself. "Either I dream I'm being chased by monstrous dogs across Bavaria. Or if I'm half awake, I wait for Desmond to get out of the lower bunk to go and shave. He's always been an early riser." Damn, he thought. I shouldn't have told her that.

"Silly me," she said when she could speak. "It's been rather a long time, Harry."

"Yes," he said. "It gives me the willies to think about the wives — having to see the rest of the world go on, and being young and human and all the rest." And Christian and Desmond married only a month or two, he thought.

"It isn't hard to be a faithful wife, Harry. I just say: *Sorry, chum,*

to the amorous beasts — and they soon catch on. Time is so precious to warriors in the realms of love."

Harry laughed. "You're very good value."

"Old-fashioned value, perhaps. What should we do, Harry, when Desmond comes home?"

"Take him away from people," Harry said. "Pamper him, but don't be sorry for him. Start a family. Advice ended."

"You're a comfort to me," said Christian Tanner. "I haven't felt so peaceful since he went to France."

And I, thought Harry. When was I comforted until tonight?

Christian was the most restful woman he had ever met. She made even Miriam, back in London, seem like a jumping jenny.

"Do you have to go on the Sunday evening train?"

"Ottawa on Monday. Yes, I must. Could you and your parents endure me until then?"

"Endure you? This is the high spot of Daddy's war, having been in the other one himself. . . . Your leg is hurting, Harry."

"How do you know?"

"Because you move it often. Does it keep you awake at night? How many good sleeps have you had this month?"

She was restful to be with, but not restful for a chap to look at. He looked out to sea. The tide had gone far out. The moon dipped to the wooded point. "Nothing spectacular," he said about the sleeping.

"I'll get you a pill then. We have some in the house."

"I don't hold with sleeping pills."

"I know," she said. "They're such a dreadful sign of weakness. But you're going to have one."

THE NEXT morning they drove around the country. He saw red flowers growing beside a river, got out and picked her one.

"A cardinal flower," she said. "How nice. I'll press it."

They ran into fog on their way home by the coast. "Has Desmond decided what he's going to do?" Harry asked. "He talked of Canada at one time."

"He seems to be keen on India again. He told me to write his firm and ask if they could give him anything upcountry. They

wrote back and said assistant manager of a sugar factory in Bihar, with good prospects."

"I should think that might be all right." He also thought that a sugar factory in Bihar might be a dim place to isolate yourself and a shining wife.

"Anywhere he wants to go," she said. "I would love the East, but India as a place to live . . . You were born there, weren't you?"

"Yes," he said. "We left when I was eight. And I went back after I joined the Regiment."

"I suppose you'll stay in the Army, will you?"

"I might if they would pass me completely fit. I don't think they will. There isn't much point in being a soldier if you can't command."

"Is command what matters?"

"You can't get anywhere worth speaking of without it."

"To the very top, you mean. All or nothing. Is that you?"

He supposed that arrogance was him. He did not answer.

"And if you leave the Army?"

"I may go back to India too," he said. "I heard from a chap the other day. He tried to get me to resign and go into tea with him before the war when he managed a garden near Darjeeling. Now he's a bara sahib, big noise, in Calcutta. I can think of worse things to do."

"Thus you'd gallop to the top in tea."

"Why do you needle me?"

"I'm sorry," Christian said. "I meant there are so many things you could do without having to be a field marshal, and tea planting might be a waste. Mind my own business."

It would have been better if he had gone today. Tomorrow he must definitely go. "I like a fog at the edge of the sea," he said lightly. "It closes you off."

"I know," she said, and they reached home.

"The wanderers return," Mrs. Foley greeted them. "Where did you go?"

"We drove around," she said.

"This leave has made a new girl out of Christian," her father said. "I wish young Desmond could see how well you look today."

Christian left the room.

"Poor child," said Mother Foley. "You do say tactless things, dear, sometimes."

THAT EVENING, they talked together again. ". . . I had to put myself tenth on our team because the thing needed watching up to the last moment. Desmond should have stayed at third, but he insisted on going ninth."

She went over to the window and shaded her eyes against the light in the room. "He would," she said. "Go on."

"But Desmond stumbled over a bloody trip wire and fell flat on his face. It was a most damnable bit of luck."

"You couldn't help him up?"

He had thought of that one too. "Time was short," he said. "In fact Willie was shouting *Stop* when I was halfway over, but by then I was committed. You see, speed was the essence of the thing. We had agreed that people must not wait for anyone."

Well, he thought. Have I told a convincing cock-and-bull?

She came to the fire, and he watched her looking down into the curl of a flame of birch bark.

"Desmond will never think it was simply bad luck," she said. "He will always think he let Harry down. That's what he means in his letters and doesn't say, and now I understand."

"He can't possibly mean that, Christian. I was lucky and he was damned unlucky. Do you think I'm pleased about it?"

"Of course not, Harry. But you don't seem to realize that to Desmond you're perfection. He failed to get over. Therefore he failed to measure up to the great Harry. Bad luck is not the point."

Had she guessed? "If he imagines he let me down, tell him not to be a fool. I owe Desmond far more than he could ever owe me."

"I know you feel that," Christian said. "But it's hard for a person as strong and unfaltering as you are to realize what you do to other people."

"I suppose I was strong enough in prison," Harry said. "I'm a flop outside it."

"Oh, Harry," she said. "How dare you think you're a flop? It isn't your fault you can't fight any more. I wonder . . ." She stared

at him. He saw that both passion and compassion were in Christian Tanner. "I wonder if you aren't supremely good at making the world revolve round you, and rather bad and petulant about being revolved yourself?"

He laughed. "You're wonderful," he said. "You pat me on the head and then give me a spanking and make me want to be a better boy."

"Schoolmarm type," she said tartly.

He watched her. He wondered what went on in the fair head of Desmond's wife. "Any plans for the morrow?"

"Would you like to sail before lunch if the fog clears?"

"Very much. But don't you usually go to church?"

"I'm going to early service. Sleep as late as you can, Harry. I'll leave a pill on the table outside your door in case you happen to decide of your own free will that you want it. Good night." She smiled, and went.

THE FOG burned off the next morning, and they sailed at eleven. "Haven't you ever sailed?" she asked.

"I capsized my company commander's wife on a lake in India. Word reached my colonel. He told me to devote my spare time to tigers. He was a wonderful hard chap with a sense of humor."

"You must have had a high old time in those old days. I would like to have seen you wild and young and carefree."

And I would like to have seen you, Harry thought. He looked at her now in blue jeans, rolled nearly to the knee, and a pale-blue work shirt. They were sailing for an island in the bay.

"How well did you know Desmond?" she asked.

"For a year in Calcutta. I took him after tiger once, upcountry. We got to know each other pretty well."

"Did you go dancing?"

"Certainly. We trotted round the fishing fleet, I mean the hopeful spinsters out from England."

"Was he the same?"

"Yes," he said, "more coltish but the same."

"And Harry Black called the tune?"

"Of course," he said. "If that's what you like to think."

"That was a carpy womanish remark I didn't really mean."

"You sometimes make me wonder if I'm human."

"Before I met you, I did wonder if you could be quite human."

Al Capone and Good-time Charlie and Sir Galahad, she had called him. "And the verdict now?"

"So many Harrys," Christian Tanner said, "but they make one terribly human Harry." Her face was tilted up to watch the mainsail.

"Are you going to get married when you go home?"

Miriam? God forbid. "Lord knows," he said.

They sailed on the starboard tack on a bright sea to the island where there was one fisherman's house. The fisherman helped them to moor the boat to his running line. "Make yourselves at home," he said. "Plenty blueberries for the picking." He went back to the door of his white house.

"Let's pick blueberries, shall we," Christian said, "with a rule not to eat many till we have enough."

They picked blueberries and ate their lunch, and then Christian said, "The fog is coming, Harry. We must go."

The fisherman hauled in the boat for them. "Come any time," he said. "I like seeing young folks around the place."

"I'm afraid I'm leaving today," Harry said. "Do you live alone here?"

"I have my boy's wife and the two kids, but they're away right now. My boy was in the Navy. He was lost in English waters."

"Oh, I'm sorry," Christian said.

"You got any kids, you people?"

She shook her head, and put her left hand with the gold ring on the gunwale of the boat and went aboard and held her other hand out to Harry. He was clumsy getting into a boat. "Good-by," they said. "Thank you very much."

"Good luck," the fisherman said, and pushed them off. They sailed before a light fog wind.

"Don't cry," he said to Desmond's wife. "Don't cry, my love."

"It would have been all right, quite all right, except for that sad kind man seeing we were happy. I wouldn't be crying, and you wouldn't have said those last words, would you, Harry?"

"No," he said.

". . . I was learning Desmond again through you, and I knew you were tired out and your leg was bad and you couldn't be bothered with people. But crowds and crowds of people, that's what we should have had around us. And last night when you insisted on telling me about the escape, I knew that it wasn't my dear good Desmond I wanted to learn about, it was you, and I was hating myself. That's why I was so unkind; I just couldn't help it."

"It isn't a kind business," Harry said. "As I discover."

"For the first time, Harry darling? Surely not after all your women."

"Yes," he said. "Downfall of a cynic. But why, *All my women?"*

"It's obvious," she said. "Fifty must have told you."

"All I know," he said, "is that in my mind and heart I have behaved in a peculiar fashion to my friend."

". . . He came back from India by way of the Pacific in 1939," Christian said, "and he had introductions to people in Toronto and we met. I was twenty, and he was that rare kind of good Englishman, wanting to give people more than he gets and so good-looking, and pure in heart, which sounds so phony but isn't with Desmond. That was two weeks in June. He went on to England, and then the war came, and he cabled and asked me to marry him.

"I went over and we were married and we were happy in those few months till January when he went to France. Not very physical, perhaps. But lots of people never know that unless the lightning hits them. I'm old-fashioned, I suppose, but there's that rude saying about making your bed and lying on it. That's all. I had to tell you, this one and only time."

"There's nothing rude about it. It makes sense. Nor is there anything rude in my wanting you." He looked at her. "We could have laughed together in the night," he said.

"We have everything to remember because we have had nothing at all, and we never will laugh together in the night. Is God angry with us for feeling this way, do you think?"

"God knows we're only human."

She laughed. "Darling, do you believe in God?"

"I do today," he said. "What God might frown on is that if I could live my life with you I might always believe in God."

"Do you know what my mother said this morning? She said: *'Christian, my child, can't you see what is happening to you?'*"

"And you replied?"

"I flounced out." She studied his face. "Your leg has been hurting you all day. I can tell now when it does, from something in your face. My poor Harry."

"Don't you mind the idea of it? Wouldn't a stump of a leg offend you?"

"Offend me? How idiotic can you be?"

It was true about the leg. The pain was not steady. It thrust at him and went away and thrust again.

"We have had a wonderfully complete nothing," Christian said. "Not even holding hands."

"I love your hands," he said.

"Could you take off the tin bit and lay your leg on the seat beside me?"

"Yes," he said. He did that.

He watched her hand with Desmond's ring.

Chapter Eight

DARJEELING: 1952

THE RAIN was loud. It rained dawn and day and dusk. He had not seen the peak of Kanchenjunga, monstrously beautiful across the valleys, for a month.

He had been playing a Beethoven sonata. He took a drink and walked a line of squares on the big Bokhara rug as straight as any plumb line to his chair. He was reading Yeats. He liked music and poetry late at night alone. Here I am, he thought soberly and sadly, going respectably to hell. In short, old boy, I've had it.

He went for the last of the decanter, and heard a jeep turn in from the Ghoom road, whining down with low-gear caution. He knew it was driven by Rex Wilbram, his wife's adorer.

He debated whether he would escape to bed before Rex had delivered Miriam to the door. But he decided that it was more important to finish the decanter. He knew that Rex would not come in.

The jeep arrived. The engine idled. The door opened and closed. The jeep drove off again. Miriam came in.

Harry stood. "Good morning."

"Hullo." She lit a cigarette. She seemed pretty sober for Sunday at three a.m.

He mixed her a gin and soda, her invariable drink. "Was the dance amusing?"

She had waterfalls of hair, chestnut at the moment. "There were inebriated gentlemen," she said in her ginny voice. She took a long drink and put the glass down.

It's unreasonable of me, Harry thought, to be offended by gin and soda. I must be reasonable in all things.

"I would have speech," Miriam said.

He used to be amused by her antiquated turn of phrase, once upon a time. He waited.

"How sober are you?" Miriam asked him. "Will you hear my prattle out?"

"Gladly," he said. He knew what he was going to hear.

"Our relations," Miriam said, "have long been a bad joke. Agreed?"

"Agreed," he said. "Go on." He saw back through indifference to squabbles, and through squabbles to reconciliations. She was talking, but he did not listen very much.

". . . Will you?"

"Will I what?"

Miriam applied powder and lipstick. "Must I start again?"

"I'm so sorry," Harry said. He sat up straight to clear the fuddle. "It's quite all right," he said. "I'll divorce you any time you like."

"Divorce *me?*"

"What else?"

"You did it to me," Miriam said.

He looked at the fire, which was nearly out. The roof dripped rain, but he thought the rain had stopped. He waited for Miriam to enlarge upon his misdemeanors.

"Item Number One: You never really loved me."

He squirmed at Item Number One.

"Item Number Two: I was a London wench. I'd only known you in London where we did have fun, you must admit."

"Yes," he said. "We did."

"Then you decided to be a planter, just for the sake of spiting yourself, or taking it out on tigers, or what I simply do not know. And you brought me to this godforsaken wilderness."

"Well," he said mildly. "Wives have been known to accompany husbands to the wilderness."

"Yes," she said. "But they require a modicum of affection from the person they go with. I could endure it for the year or so when you were learning and had to work like mad, although I did get lonely. I didn't even mind you filling the evenings with progressively more whisky, books, gramophones and sacred silence. You were kind to me in your own disgruntled way."

He knew what would be Item Number Three.

"Then the child happened, and you blamed me."

"I didn't blame you," Harry lied. The boy had lived a month. He might have said a word about her drinking all that time. But what was the use?

"Perhaps you wanted not to blame me," Miriam said. "But have you ever been near me since? I know you blamed me. So I was down here at the end of this ghastly road, conspired against by Cheddi Khan and all the servants, and repugnant to you. Can you wonder I've become what I've become?"

"You could have gone home," he said. "I suggested that."

"Yes," said Miriam. "But I cherished a small hope that you might change."

"Was going on the loose with every Tom, Dick and Harry the best way to make me change?"

Miriam giggled. For a second or two he remembered how much he had once liked tolerant Miriam, the party girl who giggled. "From the first I never pretended to be anything but what I was. But I was faithful to you while you let me be. Harry, would you like to try again? We could stop drinking, for a start. You could give up whisky if you really wanted to."

He thought he could give up with a struggle. But boredom and distaste are not things to be given up. "I'm awfully sorry," Harry said. "It wouldn't work. But if you want to know, I think you're an amazingly goodhearted woman." He cared for her not at all, yet he did not like to hurt her feelings. He got up from his chair and walked over to the window. "If you're leaving on Wednesday," he said to the window, "I suppose we'd better decide about the stuff beforehand. Please take all you want."

"Thank you," she said. "You were always openhanded. But I don't crave loot. What I crave is that you should let me be the one to get the divorce."

"Why? I haven't been unfaithful, have I?"

"You have been too faithfully wedded to the bottle." She turned to look straight at him. "It doesn't make any difference to you, Harry. I know you hate me and tea and yourself and the world, but couldn't you just help one little bit?" She mopped her eyes. "The manner of the divorce matters little to you or me; it does matter to Rex, particularly now he's being promoted to his firm's London office."

"Good Lord!" he said. "Are you going to marry that . . . ?"

"Rex happens to love me very much. I know he isn't clever or intrepid or witty or wellborn or blessed with filthy lucre like you. But he is kind, and he will look after me, and he won't constantly compare my failings with the perfections of some mysterious Venus he never knew, and I will try to look after him, too. How maudlin this must sound."

"Not maudlin, but not particularly romantic either. All right, you can have your divorce. Tell that prig to tell me what to do to be the guilty party. I don't know the procedure."

"Poor Harry," Miriam said. "You can't even be chivalrous without twisting a knife in all concerned, including you."

It was New Delhi, two years later.

Harry Black turned out of the portico of the Continental Hotel before seven o'clock in his dinner jacket. The air was sharp, yet heavily inert with Delhi winter evening smells: dung smoke, flowers, flooded lawns, ammoniated stables.

Along the street, cycle rickshaws, pony tongas, motor tongas, every kind of overladen rickshaw-tonga raced and crowded; while near at hand, beyond a wall, dhobis slapped the washing wetly.

As he crossed Queensway, a taxi nearly ran him down. He shouted at the driver, who shouted back. The Indians were the politest of all peoples, possibly; the rudest drivers in the world, perhaps. They were a callous, kind enigma.

He had flown from Calcutta in the afternoon. He was leaving India. He was on his way to see his old friend Rabat, a man he liked enough to say good-by to.

He turned into Rabat's entrance. "Salaam," he said to the Muslim servant. *"Sahib hai?"*

The sahib came bounding. "Harry!" He said it, *Hurree,* just like once upon a time. "Oh my Lord, I am so glad to see you!"

Rabat's drawing room had black furniture and filigree, pink covers, two tiger skins on the floor, a picture called the Midnight Steeplechase, a mezzotint of Garibaldi, a dreadful Hindu religious picture — a Rama and Sita sylvan scene — a picture of Rabat with a dead bison, books by Hemingway and Rabindranath Tagore. A Red Indian tomahawk would not have been especially surprising.

"I wish you would have stayed with me," said Rabat, a Hindu brigadier general, a big man now, a man who had gained in pounds and certainly in self-assurance. "But you are independent-minded, Harry, isn't it?" He laughed.

"I have a lot of things to do about the customs. I thought I'd better go to the hotel. It was kind of you to ask me, Rabat." He had seen Rabat only once or twice since the war.

"Kind?" said Rabat. "But my house is yours. Are you sorry to be leaving India for keeps?"

Harry considered this. "Not particularly," he said.

Rabat laughed. "You never were too diplomatic. You are ready for a drink? So, help yourself, man."

He poured himself some whisky and sat down again. Rabat was watching him, but looked away. "What are you going to do in England, Harry?"

"I haven't the least idea."

"What is Regimental news? What about the Colonel?"

"He was living in Shropshire, the last I heard."

"That was a man," said Rabat.

"Yes. There was nothing wrong with him." Sometimes, even nowadays, he felt the Colonel's tetchy eye upon him. "I think most of the people you knew have left, or were killed in the war. Jumbo Cotter bought it in the desert. Do you remember Jumbo?"

"Do I remember Jumbo! I think about him often, because of his elephant and the mad funny night, and because of you fighting my way into One-three-eight." Rabat shook briefly. "That is among reasons why my house is yours," he said in deadly Hindu earnest. "There was another chap with us, a civilian, but I have forgotten him."

"Desmond Tanner," Harry said. "He and I were prisoners together. Desmond is here, I believe, making sugar in Bihar. We became great friends in Germany, but I've never seen him since."

"You have avoided him, perhaps. You have avoided all your friends, perhaps."

He did not answer the implied question. He was thinking of someone he never had forgotten. He moved in his chair, dismissing the memory of Christian Tanner. "Lord, but the Colonel gave me hell," he said. "He gave me more than my share. I rather resented it."

"Some men are hardest on their favorite sons. Help yourself to more drinks. Is your mind made up about England, then?"

"About going now? Yes, I told you."

"Harry, my friend," Rabat said. "I tell you one thing." He paused. Rabat was a fighting soldier, who had commanded a battalion in Burma. But he was still a Hindu, treasuring your feelings like bone china. "I tell you one thing, are you all right, Harry?"

"Asking me or telling me?" He smiled at old Rabat.

"Your hair is still dark. You are a little thinner where I am become stout. Your face is lined, but it is the same face. And now that you are getting cross with me, your eyes have that nasty blue of when you punched the customers at One-three-eight. Your hand, how steady is it, Harry?"

Harry held up the steady hand he was so proud of.

"So you are all right then, it seems?"

"Oh yes," he said. "I'm simply wonderful. Thank you very much for asking."

Rabat leaned forward. "That iciness," he hissed. "Do not waste it out on me because I am not having any. So you are the same, physically, if somewhat worn with use, and you are the same honest man of my acquaintance, and frightened of emotions worn like mine on shirt sleeves. But I am not as simple as you think."

He laughed. "Simple! You devious old Hindu!"

"But you are sad," said Rabat. "What has life done to you here?" He put one outspread hand against the barrel of his chest. "And here?" The other on his brow.

Harry laughed again. He was a little tight. "You need more hands," he said. "Borrow one from Vishnu."

"That is vulgar blasphemy and not nice. Now help yourself to the bottle, there is plenty more, and everything I have is yours because I love you. I am afraid you do not love me quite so much."

"I love you madly," Harry said. "But I think I'll hang on for the moment."

"Love," said Rabat. He was thoughtful. "This romantic sexual love that persecutes you Westerners and becomes an old sour cup of tea, but with us is managed so much better like a nectar. Is it love that makes you sad?"

"Why all this poppycock about being sad? You're boring me."

"The worst word in your vocabulary," cried Rabat. *"Ek dam* immediately stop being a bore. Tell me, Harry, have you been shooting? The man-eaters for which you became famous, what of them?"

"The supply was limited. The inclination became limited by my evening habits." He raised his glass.

"It is a pity," Rabat said, "that you are determined to leave India this week. Because there is a bad new man-eater where I have been on tour. Shall I tell you?"

"Do," he said. He listened fairly closely.

". . . I sat up a night over the body, but it never came back. Perhaps it had crossed the hills again."

"They hardly ever do come back," he said. "But that switch across the hills is interesting and unusual. Rimli, being so much smaller than Ranipur, is the place to try, I would imagine."

"You should try, Harry. You would be the best man in India to try, if you were sobered up. I wish you would do this one thing — shoot this man-eater. Then I would be very happy. Now I hear the car. We are four for dinner, do you mind? My wife, and my sister, Somola Pant, against whom you must protect me, do you mind?"

Harry would have drunk less had he known. He stood, held the arms of the chair a moment and was steady.

"My wife," said Rabat. "And Somola. This is Harry."

He made the graceful greeting, palm to palm, obviating handshakes for himself and them.

Mrs. Rabat smiled, murmured and sat down. She was a plump and pretty little thing.

He knew, of course, of Rabat's widowed sister. Everyone knew of Somola Pant, who wrote and radioed so brightly about birth control, Goa, baby clinics, village industry, Kashmir, temperance and what not, *the Indian woman's point of view*. She was middle-aged and handsome, with the trim, vaguely

military air of women of career, whether in plain dresses or in golden saris.

"I've heard so much about you," she said. "I knew your mother well, and the General too. It is sad to think that both are gone."

"They died within six months of each other in nineteen forty-seven." He heard his voice sound cold and Anglified. He could not speak easily of that.

"They would have wished it so," she said, "after so much happiness together. Lady Black was a good friend of India in the dark days."

"Harry is a friend of India," said Rabat. "And he is leaving us. This is sad, as I was saying."

"He is English, not Indian," she said. "Why should Mr. Black not leave us?"

"There now," Rabat said, "Somola is free of the British, but she must be still freer. How ridiculous! What common language do we Indians have but English? Whence come our institutions? Who made our Army?"

"The Army is unimportant," said his sister.

"Unimportant! One day you shall see how unimportant."

"Do stop squabbling," Harry said.

They were enchanted, and Mrs. Rabat burst into tiny twitters and they went in to dinner.

"Somola, my notorious sister, I need help," said Rabat after dinner. "I was starting to persuade Harry before you arrived that he should stay on a while in India to shoot the Rimli man-eater."

"But Harry's plans are made," she said. "He has better things to do, no doubt, in England."

Rabat picked it up. "Why should he waste priceless time on risking neck when he could be shooting English pheasants? But now will you excuse me, Harry, while I do some telephones? Look after him, Somola. Make him happy with huge drinks."

Rabat went out. Mrs. Rabat looked at her sandaled toes, smiling small, serene, secret smiles. Somola Pant behaved much like a Western woman, except that she did not hold a man's eye directly. "And what thoughts will you take away of India?" she asked in his general direction.

What thoughts would he take away? Of nepotism and corruption? Of invariable courtesy and kindness? Of brilliant plans and hopeless execution? Of caste abolished but still going strong? "I don't know," he said. "It's too difficult for me, Somola."

Rabat's voice was filling the bungalow from another room. "Damn bloody fool — *Tum Bluddiful,*" he screamed. "Have you not heard of Harry Black?" It sounded like a tantrum, but for the gusts of mirth. He came back. "Well," he said. "That is all right, Harry. Rimli you said would be best chance. So then, Rimli rest-house is reserved for you, servants, shikaris, everything waiting."

"Now, listen, Rabat," Harry said. "I am not, N-O-T, going after your damned man-eater. I am flying home on Thursday."

"So," said Mrs. Pant. "You wouldn't do this last thing for us that you do incomparably well? You would not save our villagers from death and terror? You will simply say: *Good-by, India. I had my pleasure from you. Now you bore me.*"

"I don't know why you pester me like this," Harry said. "Why should I change my mind?"

"Because you would make my husband happy," Mrs. Rabat said loudly and clearly, first comment of the evening. "He is your friend. It is duty to make him happy."

He knew now that this was a plot, one of those whimsical conspiracies so dear to Hindus.

"Well," he said, "it's been a wonderful evening. I'm sorry to disappoint you, Rabat."

"No matter. We shall lunch together. One o'clock at the hotel."

"I will drop you," Somola said. "It is on my way."

Somola turned out to be an execrable driver. "I hope this doesn't compromise you," he said. To be driven about by a lone woman was unusual in India.

She laughed. "It couldn't matter less. But your chivalry is a pleasant change from what a Hindu widow is accustomed to, even an ultramodern one like me."

"What you said earlier is true. I have taken a lot from India in my time, and given precisely nothing."

"The man-eaters and rogue elephants that Rabat says you have risked your life to shoot, wasn't that giving?" she asked.

"No," he said. "Just a bit of personal spice. My best times have been in the forests of this country." Suddenly Harry saw the silk-cotton tree, the red-flowering semul in somber forest, and a medley of birds high up. He heard the kakar barking, and the chital's danger call. He thought of the scents of the first morning hour.

"But your giving nothing was not what Rabat meant," Somola said. "You know, India is a big country, and yet very small. Rabat had heard about your divorce and other things. Naturally, he would not mention that to you. It would be indelicate. But he is attached to you because of the old days, and because of some special thing you did for him. So when you wired that you were coming through, he shouted, thumping his chest: *I tell you one thing, Somola. I will save this fellow from his going-to-pot. I will put him back in jungles to sober up with this Rimli tiger. But he is a strong-willed devil and by no means simple English chap we can make rings round with our wits. We must be very cunning.*" She copied her brother's extravagant English to perfection.

"So you had this planned and plotted in advance?"

"Oh yes. Plots and plans are the breath of life to Hindus. Well, we have failed with you. But I have something else to say."

"Say on," he said.

"Perhaps I will offend you by my shocking taste, but I will say it quickly. You must have had sadness in your marriage. Well, in my work I hear of much dreadful sorrow of that kind, although different being Indian. But it is strange that my faith in the love of men and women should be from two marriages. My own was a Hindu marriage of free choice, a rarity in those days. I loved my husband, and I still do love him. The other marriage was the love your own parents had for each other."

"They were happy," Harry said. "But how do my parents affect the issue?"

"Did they not wish well for you? Are you not the child of their devotion?"

It was an impertinence.

"I have angered you," she said. "I should not have stuck my foreign nose in. But your mother was my friend, and Rabat is yours, and we are loyal friends, we Indians, that you will allow us."

"Indeed I do," he said. "You know, I think I will have a go at that Rimli animal. With less conspiracy, I might have jumped at the idea anyway, and not for any noble motives."

She laughed. "That is our trouble, we intrigue ourselves and other people inside out. But now I have a second thought. You might be killed or something awful."

"That would be an irreparable loss," he said. "And all for love of the Rabats, to make it the more poignant."

"You speak so mockingly of many things. Have you never loved a woman, truly for comfort and not only infatuation?"

How insidiously this Indian widow talked.

"Perhaps once, for a few days, I did think . . ." The memory still pained him, and he was offended at himself for weakening to speak of what he had never spoken.

"Please go on, Harry," said Somola Pant.

"She was the wife of my best friend. It was different, and I haven't forgotten."

"Then you do believe in the not-cynical corner of you. For some lucky ones love is a short cut to the tranquillity that we can also reach by faith or self-denial. Have you read the Gita?"

"I can't accept that we are created solely to deny the world."

"Oh no," she said. "We must never deny ourselves a thing." She was a sharp-tongued woman. She drew up at the Hotel Continental. "Au revoir, then. Or perhaps adieu, because I am leaving for Travancore tomorrow."

"Au revoir," he said. "Thank you again."

"Good luck with tigers, Harry," Somola said, "inside and out."

Chapter Nine

BONDHA: 1954

"Severe loss of blood. . . . Septicemia. . . . Antibiotics. . . . I am sorry if I hurt you."

He looked at the face with the arched nostrils, the sad, suffering, brown eyes with muddy whites. "What's your name?" he asked.

"Doctor Roy Chowdhury M.D.," the doctor sang. "At your service, Mr. Black."

Later, Rabat came into the room. "Bluddiful! What is this you have been doing, Harry?"

"Rabat, how . . . ?"

"I flew up with these medicines for you. . . ."

"Other medicines have failed totally," sang Doctor Roy Chowdhury M.D. "There is chloromycetin we may try as ultimate resort."

"Drink this, Harry," Christian said.

It was cool small pricks and sparks of soda water in his mouth. Oh, it was a blessing. "Thank you very much," he said.

"Go to sleep," she said.

Sleep well, my child. And now he walked a desert. He saw no ending to the clean perfection of his desert, and he was sorry when it ended, and the pains were very bad. "Too dark," he said.

He heard the noise of curtains being drawn back and saw a veranda and a garden, and he heard the sugar-pressing machinery that he was always hearing, and who should come in but Cheddi Khan. Cheddi salaamed with formal dignity with both hands to his brow.

"Where's Michael?" Harry said.

"Find Michael, could you, Cheddi Khan?" Christian said.

"What's the situation, Christian?"

"You're getting better. Is your headache very bad?"

He felt the coolness of lavender water on his brow.

"Here's Michael now."

"Michael, my son," he said.

Michael was there a little longer, then he put a hand up to his face and turned and ran.

"So muddled," he said. "I didn't mean to hurt his feelings."

"Michael's feelings aren't hurt. He's glad you're better."

"What about Desmond? And Bapu?"

"Everyone's all right. Sleep again now, Harry, till the doctor comes."

"Chloromycetin has triumphed in grim battle," sang Doctor Roy Chowdhury M.D. "I am very happy at this happy outcome."

Concussion . . . fractured ribs . . . multiple lacerations due to mauling. "We feared internal injuries, thus did not move you to the cities. But all is well under my tender care. Are you most comfortable?"

"Not *most,*" he said. "I'm wrapped up like King Tutankhamen."

"There is difference of vital breath in you." Doctor Roy Chowdhury M.D. giggled gleefully. "You are my model patient."

There was also a nurse: a middle-aged Eurasian named Miss Potterswell. And there was Bapu.

"Salaam, Bapu." The little man was just the same in his relic of a gray tweed jacket.

"The Bad One has gone away from Rimli," said Bapu. "Gone to the land beyond the mountains. This is the custom of the Bad One."

"Was the tiger wounded?" Harry asked.

"The Bad One was wounded in the back," said Bapu. "But lightly, for there was again a killing yesterday at Ranipur, and the sahib's moon is not yet altogether dead."

"What dost thou mean, my moon?"

"Did the sahib not bow seven times with money tinklings of the pocket unto the infant moon on the evening of the Bad One's coming?"

Then he must have been nearly three weeks at Bondha.

"The sahib has perhaps forgotten, but that was the first day of two sups of whisky-wine," Bapu prodded delicately.

"I wonder if Cheddi Khan is on the back veranda?" Harry called to the curtained door behind which Miss Potterswell sat.

"Give Bapu two pegs of our own whisky," he said when Cheddi Khan appeared.

Cheddi Khan raised a lordly hand, palm down, and flipped the fingers once for Bapu to follow him. Cheddi Khan did not approve.

Harry watched the lizards, yellow on the whitewashed wall. They waited inanimate for ages, so that you might wonder if they slept with eyes so beady; but he knew that the lizards were very much awake. Always in the end they pounced like cold small dragons, to get their bellies full of insects, or to chase one another

when in the mood for games. He enjoyed the lizards, but Miss Potterswell was terrified of them.

"Don't look round, Miss Potterswell," he would say when she was working on his dressings, "but I think Clarence may be going to pounce on you this very minute." Clarence was larger than Clarissa, and presumed to be the husband lizard.

Miss Potterswell would give a muted squeal and say quaint things like: *Such a chaff, you are.* She took time off in the afternoons, when it was cooler, for a little walk in the garden. But only in the garden, because Miss Potterswell had heard fearful stories of the lusts of men. The odds were on Miss Potterswell, he thought.

The morning was a good time. Christian would drop in to see him, bareheaded, back from riding the Arab pony Adonis. There was always something she had seen that she could tell him, like a tawny eagle or a herd of black buck. Each day the pains were with him but pains on the way down and out.

"What's for breakfast?" he said to Christian.

"Sausages and rumble-tumble," Christian said. She went off to feed the family, including him, on sausages and scrambled eggs. He was her child now.

In late afternoon they moved his bed out to the veranda. Michael trotted round the garden on Adonis, while Miss Potterswell walked among the flowers, wearing a solar topee instead of her nurse's hat.

"Was that better, Harry?" the boy asked.

"Yes, but lean still farther forward, elbows down, hands close in, and let the pony do it for you. . . . That boy's a natural-born horseman."

"Yes," Christian said, "and so frustrating for him only riding in the garden, which is why I watch him like a hawk. I suppose we might afford a child's pony so that I could take him out with me, but it seemed hardly worth it when we're flying home so soon, and Michael going to school in England this September."

Every day, Harry sat in bed with his binoculars to watch the wagtails on the rain-flooded lawn. March had just arrived, and migrants were flying north before the heat. The wagtails left; and then the giant fruit bats, the flying foxes, went about their business.

Then Desmond's lope would sound along the gravel, and he would call: "How goes it, Harry?" They had splendid casual gossips until the dinner hour.

Desmond had told him bare details of the tiger episode — that it had swiped him with a left hook, that he had fallen twenty feet and hit his head. Thus far he remembered. He had been saved by falling, for the animal had left him then and made off up the ravine to cover.

"How are the aches and pains?" Desmond said one evening.

"My ribs are a bit precarious, head aches off and on, scratches tickle — but I'm nearly as good as new."

"Incredible, when you realize how nearly a dead duck you were."

"Was I?"

"First, loss of blood. Transfusions settled that. Then, blood poisoning. Chowdhury tried penicillin, aureomycin, sulfa, all that we could get. There didn't seem to be much hope left when Rabat flew up with chloromycetin. I must say Rabat is a pretty terrific chap. He raised the roof with Chowdhury, took one look at our dispensary nurse and flew off to Dehra Dun for Potterswell. If you ask me, this country could do with a little of the Rabat touch. Anyway, your temperature dropped from a hundred and five to normal in one day."

"I remember the fever. I was in a desert in my dream."

"I've waited till now to speak about it, Harry. I'm damned sorry for letting you down again."

"You missed twice," Harry said. "The point about tigers is that people miss them. What's the fuss about?"

"You told me to hold my fire, and not to shoot at all unless the tiger was committed to the upper level of the ledge. I missed twice and you deliberately called the brute off me and down to you."

"You fired too soon on my account," said Harry. "So we're quits."

"I'm not sure I did. I may simply have lost my head."

"Now listen, Desmond," he cajoled him. "If I held post-mortems into things I didn't do dead right according to the book, I'd have been cuckoo long ago."

"The lack of guts never bothered you."

Which was so, he realized, in the sense of physical fears.

"This last week," he said. "The best I ever had, I think. But I'm sorry for being such a burden on the Tanners."

"I was saying last night to Christian, and she agreed, what a comfort you are to have about the place."

"Chowdhury says I can sit up in a chair tomorrow," Harry said one evening. "I ought to be elated, but I'm not."

"Why should you be?" said Christian. "It's such a lovely feeling, learning the world from a quiet corner before the world comes nagging."

"Do you think the world must nag?"

"No, Harry. But life has to be battles, doesn't it, to lose and win and start again each day."

"You know," he said, "I've never felt serene before, not quite like this."

"Look at all the battles you've been winning," she said. She was knitting a blue sweater for Michael's English winter. They were steel needles with hard clicks, gleaming under the electric light. "To suffer and never to complain, not once. I would call that bravery."

She said nice things quietly to him for the first time now. He wondered why she said them. "Talking of serenity," he said, "I can't imagine life defeating you. My mother had the same thing in her different way."

Christian looked down at her knitting. "I wonder if your mother felt as terrified as I do about Michael, if she knitted sweaters for you to wear three weeks away in England at the age of eight. And it's only overnight by air these days."

"I know," he said. He had known that thought in Christian who was now his friend. He had seen it in the fingers flying faster. "You and Desmond, you're a good strong couple."

"It's a small thing," Christian said, "when God is here to help us."

He closed his eyes, and now again he saw his dream, the desert of tranquillity. But he was thinking about the beauty of the faith

that spoke in Christian: *When God is here to help us.* He wondered how you came to that. He did not understand it and was not able to accept it, and did not need it now, replete with gratitude, contentment. He smiled. Christian watched him, smiling too. Peace and trust were strong between them.

"If I could paint," she said, "I would paint you with your eyes closed smiling there like that. Resignation is perhaps the thing I mean. It wasn't in your face before." She held the small sweater up to look at it. "I've been thinking," she went on, "that when you get really well and strong enough to travel, perhaps at the end of March, why don't you go home by boat instead of flying?"

"That's a good idea," Harry said. He had not considered plans, or anything beyond this house. He looked out past Christian to the darkness, thinking of her idea of a voyage. He saw the blackness of the heights of Rimli. The heights were well known to him. They now rose of a sudden in their blackness. They menaced him and challenged him grotesquely. "I will do that, I think," he said. "But first I have a small account to settle." His pulse ran up and he was cold. He shut his eyes again.

"I SUGGESTED the sea voyage," said Christian to her husband in their room at night, "and he agreed at once it was a good idea. And then I saw the thought of that brute hit him suddenly, and his face changed altogether. Oh Desmond, what a fool I am."

"Not a fool, my love," said Desmond. "But the leopard doesn't change his spots. Harry'll be on the rampage any day now, mark my words."

Change his spots, she thought. . . . The leopard is a deadly beast.

THEY WERE sitting with their backs against a tree. Harry did not have his leg on. He saw the Bad One. He saw it past the spreading banyan tree, past the bright green grasses. It was watching them, he thought. *Christian,* he said, *I did a stupid thing. I left my tin leg in the car. Would you bring it? Of course,* she said, and ran off in her tartan shorts.

He could not see the tiger now. He thought the tiger might have gone away. He waited, alert as any deer. And then he saw a

weaving in the grass, a slow parting and a swaying. *Go home!* he thought of shouting; but it was wiser to be absolutely still, alone with an immensity of jungle and the Bad One.

The swaying of the grass had stopped. He waited and he wondered and he watched. He was almost sure that it had gone away.

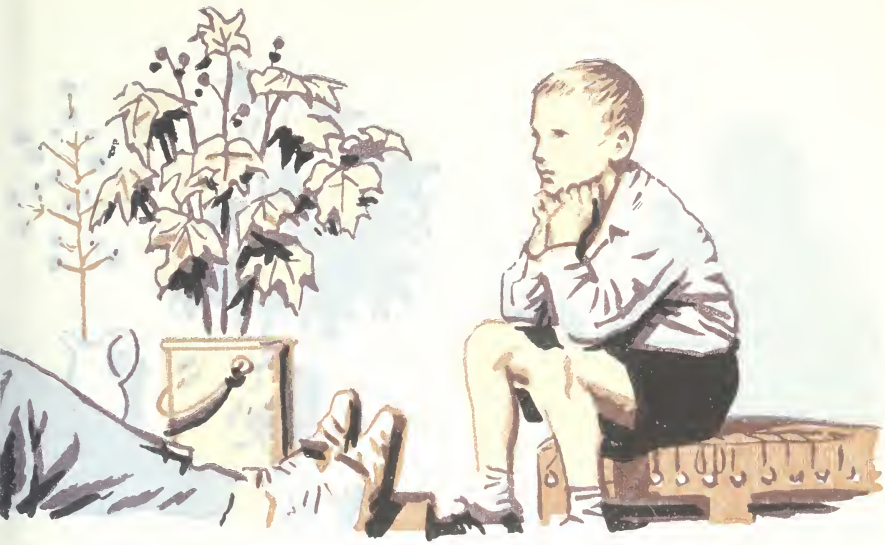
The tiger had not gone away. It stepped out of the tall grass to search deliberately right and left, the tawny orange and the black against the pretty greens. The eyes swept across his tree and round to his right and back again past the tree, not even seeing him. It strolled across the open ground. It was a burly tiger of great size, the master of the jungle, the killer with a killer's rippling grace.

The Bad One had not noticed him. He had been right to rely upon his stillness. Now if he had lost his nerve, and gone scurrying for that tree . . .

But the dupe was Harry Black. The tiger came now, silent, terrible, enormous. Now, *now,* NOW! . . .

"What *is* it, Mr. Black?" Miss Potterswell in night attire and in a twitter, bending over him.

The house was a hubbub in the night. "Harry, old boy, are you all right? You let out the most awful piercing yell."



"Sorry," Harry said. "Just a dream. I'm quite all right."

Miss Potterswell and Desmond retired. The chokidar — the watchman — hawked loudly in the garden. His ribs were hurting, but that got better and he slept. In the morning he felt quite all right.

"Mrs. Johnson asked Mummy to go over, so she says could you start me on my Sunday lessons, Harry?" Michael asked. Mrs. Johnson was the wife of the sugar-cane superintendent.

"I can have a try," said Harry. "But it's not my usual line of business, so you'll have to help me."

"Here's Mummy's Bible. You take that and I'll keep mine. First, you have to ask me the questions in the Catechism."

He took the printed leaflet with a child's picture of Christ and the disciples, and underneath: *Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.* "All right," said Harry Black. "Here goes. . . ."

Once he had known the Gospels fairly well. He enjoyed this lesson in the company of Michael, who questioned and accepted with a child's whole heart. How near the teaching, unadorned, uncomplicated, undogmatized, lay to a child's heart.

"Only two or three more questions. First: Which is the great commandment?"

"Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul and with all thy mind and with all thy strength," said Michael rapidly and gravely.

"Full marks. What is the other great commandment?"

"Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself."

"What does *thy neighbor* mean?"

"The person in the next house, like the Johnsons, doesn't it?"

"Them and everybody else, the ones you know and ones you don't, the Eskimos and the Kikuyus, the whole bang shooting match, caboodle and palaver, I would guess."

Michael laughed. "Oh gosh, you're funny."

"Order in the house. Final question: Which does it say is the most important one of those commandments?"

"It says the first one, loving God. But I don't quite see that, Harry. Because if you have to love everyone the same, how can you love God any more?"

Christian had come in. She smiled at them. "We need assistance," Harry said.

"You have to love God best and first," she said. "Then you can love people better. It's about the hardest thing to understand, like when Christ said: *Who is my mother?* I can't remember where it comes. There's a Concordance, Harry, at the end."

He turned to the Concordance, where he saw a pressed flower, faded red. He looked at that. He found a reference in Mark: *"And the multitude sat about him, and they said unto him, Behold, thy mother and thy brethren without seek for thee. And he answered them, saying, who is my mother or my brethren? And he looked round about on them which sat about him, and said, Behold my mother and my brethren! For whosoever shall do the will of God, the same is my brother, and my sister, and mother."*

"You see, Michael, that was Christ speaking, and He was perfect, but we aren't a bit, so we just have to try. Try to love everyone is all it really means, even if they don't love you."

Michael looked at Miss Potterswell's closed door. He leaned to Harry. "I don't love her," he hissed. "She absolutely stinks."

Michael was rebuked. He muttered an apology and went.

"He's such a chameleon," she said. "An angel, then a fiend next minute. But I must say Michael has a point about her. Her departure will not be mourned by me." Christian seemed upset.

"What is it, Christian?"

"Oh, nothing. She'll be gone tomorrow."

It was midday, time for his tonic, administered punctual to the minute by the paragon Miss Potterswell. She knocked.

"Come in," he said.

"Oh, I did not mean to be a spoilsport. . . ." She often said silly things like that, coyly, but without the slithering sly edge he noticed now.

He looked for some time at starched Miss Potterswell. "Miss Potterswell," he said. "When I want you to be a spoilsport, I shall ring my bedside bell, thank you very much. Now take that stuff away and ask Cheddi Khan to come here. Then have my crutches ready, please. I'm getting up."

"But Doctor said . . ." Miss Potterswell thought better of what Doctor said. She was afraid of this new icy Mr. Black. She scuttled for the door.

"So that was it."

"Yes," said Christian. "My ally, Mrs. Johnson, passed it on to me. Miss P. was over seeing them last evening — she murmured that you and I enjoyed our talks so much it seemed tactless to disturb us. Various other small innuendoes. So wicked, Harry, and so untrue."

There had been no strain at all between them. The strain had now arrived, and not because of petty slanders by Miss Potterswell. He was stepping from his cloister and the world awaited him.

"Never mind," he said to Christian. He was troubled at the truth of what had been untrue.

He watched her walk away across his room. She was a slender woman. He saw her as a woman again, touchable, although he had not touched her.

"Christian!"

"Yes?" She turned, a hand on the wall beside the door, an arm out straight and bare. He had never held her; he had never kissed

her; why should he deny himself this question? "That pressed red flower. Would it be a cardinal flower?"

Christian nodded slowly. She shut the door behind her.

He sent Cheddi Khan to Rimli in the car for Bapu. He rang the bell to summon Miss Potterswell and crutches. He was in a hurry now again.

Chapter Ten

"UNTIL NOW there have been two killings Ranipur-side," Bapu said. "When a third man dies, the Bad One may return to Rimli, perhaps at the fullness of this moon, who knows?"

Ten days to the March full moon.

"Who knows? thou sayest, Bapu. But thou art wise, knowing many hidden things."

Bapu cackled briefly, squatting in the mango's shade in the Bondha garden. "Sahib, only I know that the Bad One waits for me."

"Is there a secret place where the tiger waits for thee?" Harry watched Bapu.

"Is not every resting place a secret to the tiger?" Bapu drew his tattered sleeve across his nose, thoughtfully and quite gracefully from right shoulder all the way along to wrist. He was looking at the heights of Rimli. "The tiger travels far to hunt by night and rests by day in secret places. But who am I to say such things to the Bara Sahib Bahadur, killer of many tigers?"

"I am a killer of tigers," Harry said, "but thou art a man born to the secrets of the tiger. Listen now and keep this other secret: Cut bamboo poles and smaller pieces, and with strong jungle ropes fashion a chair tomorrow wherein I may be carried to the Pass of Rimli. At thy return give this letter to Tara Singh." It was a copy of his letter posted today to the District Forest Officer asking for immediate news by telephone of further human kills at Ranipur.

Bapu stood again. He seemed restless.

"How is it now for thee at Rimli? Is there trouble?"

"There will be no trouble till the Bad One kills again, for men fear the sahib, who is my protector." Bapu bent swiftly, and laid his brow against the point of Harry's slipper. *"Mera Bap,* my father," Bapu said. "At the first news I will come."

Harry watched him lope away. Why the reverence and why the hurry? What went on in Bapu's mind?

He swung onto his crutches from the basket chair, steadied, and made back across the garden. It was only ninety in the shade, but the sun was hot. He should have worn a hat. He rested in the portico beside Christian's potted plants. Now the steps, but they were troublesome. She must have been watching, for she came out with her fair hair flying, caught him as he fell and dumped him in a chair.

"You're crazy," she said with that crossness Michael evoked in her occasionally. "You're just plain crazy."

Things stopped going round. He was not crazy. He had a purpose: Bapu's Bad One was no longer just a job. "Not crazy," he said. "Brokenhearted at Miss Potterswell's departure. I tipped her, whereupon she wept, and Cheddi took her to the station."

"You're so generous," she said. "You pay us far more than it costs us for your board."

"I have nothing else to spend it on," he said. "Not even drink."

"And no desire for drink at all?"

"No desire," he said, "for drink at all."

"I think that's wonderful," she said. She looked at the dust devils, gathering and darting in the garden. "Please don't go after that tiger till you're really well and strong. Promise me, Harry?"

He was not making promises to Christian. "Tell me," he said, "how do you contrive to do your hair so well? It has a plain elegance, like those slinky *Vogue* girls." He said it casually to divert her, but then he rather wished he had not said it because the casual days were over.

"You're a flatterer, although I must say a compliment does something for a woman in this climate." Her face colored and went pale again. She wore those linen tartan shorts, long ones to the knee. Her legs were good enough to be even more appealing with low heels.

"You and Bapu hatching plots and plans," she said. "How to take Mohammed on his crutches to the mountain, I suppose." She looked down at him and smiled. The wits of Christian Tanner more than matched his own, he realized.

"Just a nattering of cronies," Harry said. "I like old Bapu."

"He's nice," she said. "Well, if Michael and I are really flying on the thirtieth, I'd better go and sort his things."

That night he dreamed about the tiger again. He dreamed the horror every night. But his headaches had stopped, and his wounds were healed. Doctor Roy Chowdhury M.D. could strap him tight, and the ribs were hardly any bother.

He and Desmond strolled the circuit of the garden, and the moon was all but full. He did well enough with one stick and with pauses in the wicker chair.

". . . They said they could find me a job in the London office, but I must understand that chaps like me are two a penny nowadays in England; whereas people with practical experience of India are few and far between."

"That's true," said Harry. "How would the salary at home compare?"

"Half what I'm getting now. Of course, I could leave the company and look for something else, perhaps in Canada. That sounds all right until you try it at the age of forty-plus, and they say *What can you do?* and you say *I can make sugar in the plains of India,* and they say *Thank you very much.* The company have us in a cleft stick. But I may have stirred them up, because today arrives this Bihar offer at twice my present salary."

"They must think well of you," he said. It was not difficult to know why. Desmond was shrewd and sensible, a good man with his fellow men of any hue. He had not lost energy in this enervating land.

"I think they do," said Desmond without conceit. Vanity and conceit simply were not in him. "It's a pistol at my head, of course. You can accept our wizard offer now, or you can be a clerk in London. But a job with fifteen factories to look after in Bihar and the United Provinces — it means touring all the cold weather, and

sweating it out in Lucknow all the hot weather — a pretty lonely life for Christian, don't you think?"

What does it matter what I think? "What does she say?"

"She said: *Are we to be nomads all our lives?* Then she said, of course I must take the job because it's such a splendid offer. But it's not only my life, Harry. It's hers and Michael's. I wish I knew what she really wanted."

"I expect she wants what you want," Harry said. "And you really want the job, so you'd better take it."

"It's a weakness of yours," Desmond said surprisingly, "that you see things simpler than they are. I wish you'd sound out Christian for me. You're great buddies, and she might spill the beans to you, being a disinterested party, so to speak."

So to speak. "I might try," he said. He might not try.

"They said if I wanted to discuss it I must fly down to Calcutta day after tomorrow. That means leaving by car tomorrow evening."

"How long will you be away?"

"A week or so," said Desmond. "I must say it's a comfort to know you'll be here to look after the others for me. I mean, Johnson's not a bad chap but he doesn't quite speak Christian's language."

Harry got up and they walked again. "If the man-eater makes a kill across the pass," he said carefully, "I'll have to go over to Rimli."

"Not this week, Harry! You can't possibly go after that animal for another fortnight. Good Lord, man, you can't even walk a hundred yards without resting."

"I can drive," he said. "I can ride an elephant. I can sit still and shoot. What more do you want?"

"What more I want," said Desmond, "is that you should behave like a reasonable human being. You may not care what happens, but we do."

He spoke with the round vehemence of a friend. Harry accepted the rebuke, which he might have heeded but for complications that had not occurred to blind old trusting Desmond.

"The best chance of all is right in the Pass of Rimli when the tiger crosses," he explained. "I don't have to be mobile there."

"What if you wound it?"

"I won't wound it," Harry said. "I shall kill it."

"I wish I had your confidence in myself," said Desmond, mild again. "Well, of course, you've earned that."

They neared the bungalow. The night was stiller now, with no humming and hissing and grinding, for at last the sugar-crush was over. But they heard drums beat out a complicated rhythm in some village. A jackal howled this side of Rimli, and the howl was taken up, a first jackal chorus of the night; then silence. "Listen," Harry said. "The koel!" That was a call of heat. *Ko-el, ko-el.* . . . Insistent, up and up the scale, climbing in excitement, scrambling to a summit, stop. The koel was a kind of cuckoo, less fevered than its kinsman, the brain-fever bird.

"The hot weather," Desmond said. "Well, thank goodness Christian and Michael will be out of it by April."

He called Christian, and she came to sit with them beside the unlit garden lamp. Harry watched the heights of Rimli.

"Harry threatens to go after the man-eater if it comes soon again, which I have a hunch it will. I've been trying to talk sense into the man," Desmond said. "I wish you'd use your woman's wiles."

"No," she said. "I won't."

He saw Desmond's head flick round to Christian. The koel started up again, up and up and UP. . . .

HARRY took Michael with him the next afternoon on a drive to the far side of Rimli forest. They followed the Rimli road almost to the forest edge, and then swung left round its lower boundary, driving by rutted tracks. The wheat was ripening, and already the earth thirsted at the beginning of intolerable thirst. Dust swirled in to coat the floor, the seats, the wheel, to make dusty millers of Harry Black and Michael Tanner.

He drove slowly to spare his passenger and to spare his ribs. He let Michael change the gears. Wherever he looked, except to the forest to the right, men were working. Wherever a man might look in the plains of India, men and women would be toiling against hunger on the hungry land.

"The people in India are very poor and hungry, aren't they,

Harry?" Michael said. "So why does God make more and more people so that there are too many for the food?"

"I don't know," he said. It was a mystery to him how anyone could see God and the milling masses of an Indian bazaar.

"I asked Mummy, and she said we don't have to try and wonder why. I thought perhaps you could tell me."

"Sorry, Michael," he said. "I can't."

"Besides," said Michael, whose deity was an intimate and baffling acquaintance. "If God makes everybody, who makes God?"

"Now look, pardner," he said, "your Daddy and Mummy are good godly sort of people who might help about that knotty puzzle. But I'm only an old sinner, and I can't."

"You're a jolly nice old sinner," Michael said. "I wish you always lived with us."

They swung round the bottom of the forest preserve, ran up a slope beside the River Garda. The river was low. It looked like bean soup. Michael did not seem to mind the dust or heat or jostling. He was a tough-spirited small boy. Harry enjoyed Michael's companionship. The boy was dear to him as no boy had been before, and he was going to lose this boy as he had lost everything before.

They came to the wide watercourse which crossed from the forest to join the River Garda. It was bone dry at this season. They jolted over and climbed the far bank in low-ratio low gear.

"Can we stop a minute?" Michael asked. "I've never been here."

He stopped and they got out to see the river. An Indian boy grazed a flock of goats, a child of about Michael's age, potbellied, with a long Hindu topknot.

"What are those marks on the sandbank in the middle, Harry?"

"They look like a crocodile's tracks. But I'm not a crocodile authority. It might be a turtle for all I know. Ask that boy."

Michael asked the boy in fluent Hindi. They faced one another, the dark child and the light child, wary puppies of two breeds. *"Itna, itna bara!"* Michael said with glee, returning. "He says it's a huge old crocodile full of silver bracelets and dead ladies' bones. Could we wait for it to come out?"

"Perhaps another day." They started back by the Rimli forest

road. They stopped at the Range Office. There Tara Singh was waving his arms and prancing fatly, and what Harry had hoped and feared and wanted and not wanted had unquestionably happened. He knew before Tara Singh announced that a man had been killed today in Ranipur.

"What time was the kill?"

"Just now about one hour back, surely."

"Well done, Ranger Sahib," he said. "Get Bapu. Get four strong men. I shall be back within an hour." It was almost five o'clock. "Hold tight, Michael boy," he said. "We're going to bounce like billy-oh." He put his left hand on Michael's shoulder, and held him down the five miles bouncing to Bondha.

In the late daylight, he stopped the car at the island in the main watercourse, where he and Bapu had separated on the evening of his first encounter with the tiger. Bapu and the four Garhwalis disembarked. They were chunky, thick-calved little men.

"Cheddi Khan," he said. "These people will carry me to the pass. Wait here for their return, then take them and Bapu down to the resthouse. Drive then to Bondha and bring out my baggage to Rimli. Is it understood?"

"It is understood. But, sahib, let me sit with you tonight. I have served Your Honor many years, and I ask this."

Cheddi Khan knew that the way to sit was to sit alone. But one of the reasons Harry was fond of Cheddi was that Cheddi did not fear him. Harry was tired and in some pain. He got out and turned his back on Cheddi's mutterings.

Bapu brought the chair he had made, a craftsman's job, and Harry sat in it. "Quick!" he said, for the day was nearly done.

The Garhwali porters ran with a broken step, and the motion was quite pleasant, like a dinghy in a choppy sea. Panting but cheerful, they decanted him at the Pass of Rimli as the sun was setting. "*Shabash!* Well done," he said.

He wore a cardigan because there would be a chill up here before the morning. But it was hot now in the toasted cleft of rock. "Bapu," he said, "when will the Bad One come up from Ranipur?"

"With a killing at afternoon, who knows? If the Bad One comes

this night, then surely not early in the night, so soon after feeding."

Harry made himself comfortable in a niche on the left side of the pass. "Go then, Bapu."

"I will show these men the way back to the motor gharry. But I will come back and stay tonight in a tree within hearing of the sahib." Bapu stated this; he did not ask it. He spent half his nights up trees.

Harry nodded, and Bapu went.

From his niche, Harry faced northeast, toward Ranipur. He saw a pine tree close beyond the opening of the pass and, far away, the wall of the first big hills. He had the long torch with him, but not fitted to the rifle, for this was the night of the March full moon. This assignation with the last tiger of his life was the simplest in his whole experience, and he looked forward to it more keenly than to any previous assignation. It was his last tiger and the first tiger he had ever hated.

Night had come, and the moon had risen, but this nook of his had a roof. He would be in shadow the whole night. He felt all right and keen of eye. He watched the Ranipur gateway of the pass. He must never relax vigilance. But he could be too alert, seeing a tiger where there was no tiger, imagining the Bad One's bushy face loom low and stealthy at the gate.

He had a stratagem for that; he went wandering in his mind. He wandered with the noises of the night outside. Not many came in here. One sound grew and faded once above the pass, a gaggling of geese, a wild sound of the wild birds flying high to nest in the mountains—free travelers, and he the small earthbound man.

Kill it, Harry! Christian had said this afternoon, as if meaning him to exorcize a devil. He wondered why she had said that in that way, being a gentle person.

Desmond would have left by now. He could think Desmond's thoughts for him. What's the *right* thing? he would be worrying. What's the best for Christian and Michael? With humility and rectitude. The truth was that Desmond had everything except the one absolute that mattered. All he lacked was the ultimate bite of spunk. He had failed to go in the prison escape. He had made a foul-up with the tiger. He always would.

You either had it or you did not have it. Men were subject to the law that governed every living thing: the law of taking what you were strong enough to take, and holding what you had guts enough to hold; and what was society but a conspiracy to hide that truth, to bolster up weak people? *I wish I had your confidence in myself,* said kindly Desmond in the garden. *Well, of course, you've earned that.* I have, Harry thought.

And now something stood in moonlight in the gateway of the Pass of Rimli: a jackal, coming through from Ranipur. It raised and lowered its muzzle. It walked quite boldly, doglike, perhaps twenty yards this way along the pass until it saw him. The jackal fled brush-low and grayish in the moonlight back to Ranipur. I bet the little sod will go and tell the Bad One, Harry thought.

Now something else was coming through: a small thing, tacking for passage on the moonlit floor. He looked down at the scorpion, hearing a minute scrabble, a tap of hard-shelled claws below him. He bore no grudge against the four-inch monster, but he thought its home might be in the rocky crevice where he sat. He had once been stung, which had not been funny. He thought of assaulting it with the coffee thermos Christian had made him bring, but he hesitated, not willing to break an impeccable stillness of half a night. The scorpion took off at a fair scorpion clip for the next bend in the pass en route to Rimli.

No more one-way traffic as yet from Ranipur. It was midnight, from the angle of the moon.

He waited for the animal which had mauled him, and which had lately haunted him in the defenseless lands of sleep. The odds were against its coming. The kill had been too late; the tiger was more likely to cross tomorrow night. But he knew in his guts that sometime or other, soon or late, before this night was over, the man-eater would suddenly be filling the entrance of its only road back to Rimli. He would put the first soft-nosed bullet from the four-six-five into the center of the chest, or, if the head was low, then smack between the eyes. The thing was in the bag.

He was uncomfortable in some places, and his head was aching. Get down, he told his tiresome body. Get down, you! And it did.

You know, he thought, I don't know even if she still likes me.

She liked me for conversation when I was the convalescent, safely tucked away in bed. That was when I got to know her and to like her as a friend. The only one I ever knew like her, and this is very odd, was my own mother.

Well now, to continue, we are good friends without an edge of any kind, and then one morning I awake in full possession of my senses. And she, who liked me as an interesting invalid, dislikes my real self very much. She has not changed, but I have changed since that week-end in Canada, three sad and innocent and lovely days for which she pressed a flower. I was an honorable dolt. I should have taken her while picking blueberries on that island of the fisherman. It would have been treachery to Desmond, but Desmond did not make it in the escape, Desmond had not earned her.

He heard two noises. First he heard the sawing sound of a leopard, down in Ranipur. That was a leopard on the prowl, and it could mean alarm. The night must be wearing through to three o'clock, for now the whole pass was shadowless before the moon, and the rock had cooled. A puff of mountain wind passed through.

The second sound was a kakar barking. The kakar was an alarmist, a barker at anything, including Bapu up a tree.

Aggressive, she thinks me, tiger-vindictive, lusting to settle my account. She despises hate, so she said one day. Ruthless, she thinks me. Well, so I am. A courage fanatic. Well, so I am. An all or nothing. Well, so I am. A perfectionist for everyone but me. I know, I know. But I'm not a goody-goody wanting to be better.

He watched, and still the tiger did not come.

Let's pick blueberries, Harry, shall we, with a rule not to eat many till we have enough? — No! We shall pick and eat and stain our mouths with blueberries.

He turned his head to a soft sound close behind him. The tiger stalked him on its belly in the pass. Its fangs were bared and its coat had a patterned luster below the moon.

He screamed. His right forefinger had lain along the trigger guard these nine quiet hours. His finger snatched at the triggers, and the world exploded twice. Harry screamed again while two bullets went on to Ranipur, and one tiger went back to Rimli.

He screamed his terror to the jungles down ahead at Ranipur and down behind him at Rimli. He screamed his terror in the March full moon.

Chapter Eleven

"SAHIB!" And again: "Sahib!"

Bapu. Who was Bapu? Would Bapu come baleful and enormous as a tiger round this bend from Rimli? Harry huddled in his small retreat.

It was close now, that jungle voice. "Sahib! Sahib?"

He shrunk farther in, while he heard himself cry: "No! No!"

"Are you hurt, sahib? It is I, Bapu." And the man came padding larger than life along the pass from Rimli.

Harry Black stared up at him. He felt tiny below this Bapu with the round face and the same old jacket. He feared the man who stood so still, looking down in here at him. "Has the Bad One come?" Bapu whispered.

"From Rimli."

Bapu snatched the torch from Harry's side without a by-your-leave or any comment, and he went back along the pass to Rimli. I could shoot at him, thought Harry, while he puts on his searching act. But I wouldn't dare, and it would do no good, because he would just change to his tiger self, or he would go and call his Friend, and better the devil I know than that again, *that,* THAT.

Bapu came back without sound. "It is the Bad One. There is one scarred pug mark. But how could the Bad One have crossed over to Rimli today? Sahib, I do not understand this."

Harry shook his head, looking at Bapu's spatulate toes.

"I sat in the pipal tree beside the rao. I heard a leopard call in Ranipur, and then I heard a kakar bark in Rimli. Except for these, I heard no other wild things speak."

Harry nodded, and he put a palm against his chin to stop the chattering.

"The sahib is sick. The Bara Sahib Bahadur was wrong to defy the weakness of his body."

Bapu whipped off his gray tweed jacket and he put it like a cloak over the shoulders of the great brave master. He freed the four-six-five gently from the clutch of Harry's hands, and broke it neatly. The brass cases flew away ping-ping against the rock, and Bapu leaned in to take two more shells from the stitched recesses on Harry's bush shirt. The shells slid home with a healthy *sonck*. The breech clicked shut. "Rest now, sahib. I will stand watch until the dawn."

Bapu went away. Good old Bapu. Harry knew, of course, that the local suspicions about Bapu were all nonsense. But he did not sleep or rest for the remainder of the night. He drank the coffee that Christian Tanner had made for him, and he thought: What will Bapu say about me? It was a new kind of thought for Harry Black.

The Garhwalis arrived before the sun had topped the hills. There was gabbling outside Harry's niche. Bapu came for him.

"Sahib," said Bapu, "the Bad One did not kill *yesterday*. The Bad One killed the *day before yesterday* in the afternoon at a far corner of Ranipur. This true second message came in the night while we were here. This is why the Bad One came to the pass from Rimli."

How simply the inexplicable was explained. How much he hated Tara Singh, about whom Bapu now expressed himself with sibilant ferocity.

Harry got into the carrying chair. The Garhwalis stared at him, he knew, as he stared over the Rimli forest. It was the pretty time of a new day, and the air was cool. The jungle cock crowed the morning in the jungle.

But he saw the tiger in the jungle. He saw the tiger in the crashing of a pig. He saw the tiger in the wavings of the pale dead grass. He heard the tiger in a slither and a rattle in a bamboo clump. He feared the tiger everywhere as his carriers picked a running way down the watercourse, widening to safety, but it was not safe. Surely he was in his dream again, and soon now, any second, he would wake up to see Miss Potterswell, to hear Desmond's voice of comfort: *Harry, old boy, are you all right?*

Cheddi Khan was standing beside the old rattletrap at the island.

Cheddi and Bapu exchanged whispers. They all stared at him.

"Sahib, you have a fever," Cheddi said.

Perhaps he had a fever, but it was a cold one. He felt safer and safer on the slow way down. He did not mind that Cheddi drove atrociously, as always. He did not mind the bumps, the dust or anything, and at last they reached the forest resthouse, where chokidar and waterman waited to salaam with smiles.

He went inside. "The bed is ready," Cheddi said. "Breakfast, sahib?"

"Bring tea," he said. He sat down in the long-armed Roorkee chair, and closed his eyes.

"Your Honor, you must eat and sleep," said Cheddi Khan with tea, "and I will drive to Bondha for the doctor."

"I do not need the doctor," Harry said. "You will in no wise go to Bondha, is it understood? Put the tea beside me. Go away."

He drank hot sweet brown tea. He felt it do his body good. He was not afraid now behind doors and shutters in the room. But all the things that he had ever done in his life were now undone by panic in the Pass of Rimli.

He half-filled his mug again with tea. He went over to the cupboard. There were seven bottles in an opened case. Seven bottles was a lovely lucky lot of ammunition.

He laced the mug up to the brim, and drank it tepid. Soon Cheddi came with inquiries about eggs for breakfast, with pious clucks and frowns of disapproval, and with pleadings.

"Oh, go to the devil," said Harry Black.

Cheddi went.

He admired the first brown bottle, down a bit. "My friend," he said. He scuttled off to a private heaven with his friend.

Light from another dawn came through the shutters, hateful light coinciding with the dying of his oil lamp, out of juice. Enough to see a lizard in a corner of the ceiling.

He was offended by the lizard. He disliked the way it swam about the ceiling, and the vulgar chirpings it made. He shouted at the lizard, which pretended not to hear him.

I really mustn't, Harry thought. I must stick to my noble

principle of never killing anything unless it endangers man, or provides sustenance. Lizards do not kill you.

The lizard squeaked at him. He could not stand such insolence a moment longer. The law of the jungle, after all, says: Kill. I know Christian would disapprove. She disapproves of hurting anything. I'm sorry, hateful lizard, but it has to be.

He held his automatic pistol in both hands. He closed an eye and took most careful aim. The lizard swam round and round. The muzzle of the .38 swam round and round. He was not in any hurry. He kept on aiming till they all swam round together. Then he fired. The lizard fell. It was a damned good shot, as good a pistol shot as he had ever made; but then, of course, he was a first-class shot with pistols too.

Rattlings of doors. "Sahib! Sahib!"

"Do let me have some peace," he called. "I'm shooting lizards."

He felt sorry for the poor dead lizard. Cruel brute, he was. He had another drink of Bottle Number Three.

"Oh, hullo," he said. "How nice to see you." He saw her dimly. But light suddenly glared, hard torturing light. "Shut it! Please shut the window!" He put his hands before his eyes.

"No," she said, "not until this whisky stink blows out. I'm sorry." The cruel woman.

"What time is it?" he asked.

"Noon," she said.

"Why you come?"

"Because Desmond would have wanted me to. Drink this soup."

"No."

"Drink it," Christian said.

He drank some because he was afraid of her, but immediately he was very sick.

"My fault," she said. "I should have had the basin handy."

He heard the scrubbing noise, and he looked over. She was on her hands and knees. "Christian, y'can't do that. Get sweeper."

"I would not insult the sweeper," Christian said.

She finished cleaning up. "Well, that's that," she said, and stood again, holding the bucket.

"Have to tell you . . ." He was trying very hard. "Have to tell you. Only woman I ever liked in all my life."

"Lizards," she said. "You like lizards." She dropped the dead lizard in the bucket.

"I know," he said. "I'm sorry."

"Now drink the rest of this."

"Can't," he said. "Kill me."

"All right, I'll kill you."

So he drank the soup. She wiped his face. She gave him something else to drink, bitter.

"Thank you," Harry said. "Please don't go. Please . . ." He looked at her. He was surprised to see tears rolling, slithering and slipping down her face. "Please stay, Christian."

"Next room," she said. "Now sleep." Peculiar how she could cry so hard like that, and her voice be her own sweet sobless voice.

He woke up and he could not find it. Bottle Number Four was not on his bedside table. Five, Six and Seven nowhere to be seen. He shouted for Cheddi Khan, who arrived with a rude knock and a tea tray. Cheddi closed the door behind him quickly.

"Take that muck away," he said. His mood was fairly lethal. "Bring the whisky."

"The Memsahib waits in the other room," said Cheddi Khan. And he added pointedly and gravely: "The Lady Sahib." Cheddi Khan had an unprecedented devotion to Christian.

"The Lady Sahib has done sweeper's work today," said Cheddi Khan in Urdu. "You shave," he added in English, which he had never used to his employer. He spoke English now as insult and rebuke.

Harry shaved in bed. He managed a water biscuit and a cup of tea. He put on his tin leg, his clothes. Cheddi proffered crutches, but he declined them. He made it to the door, whence an arm-stretch took him to the table in the next room. "Sit down," she said.

He sat on the small chair. She was sitting in the big chair by the fireplace with a book of poetry of his. The veranda door was open, and the sun was low. The bottles were beside him. "I've got to have a drink," he said. "Sorry. Got to."

She came over and gathered the four bottles to her bosom. "No," said Christian. "Nothing doing."

"Just one. I must, Christian. Don't you understand?"

She did not answer, simply sat again and put the bottles down beside her.

"Why did you come?"

"I told you," Christian said. "Because Desmond would have wanted me to come."

How to get rid of her and get the drink; knotty problem. He tried wheedling. She did not answer. He was angered by these ill manners. "I wish you'd mind your own business," Harry said.

"I wish you'd let me," Christian said.

He was ashamed. "I apologize," he said. "I only meant . . ." But he could not quite remember what he meant. "What happened, Christian?"

"Nothing more noteworthy than a jag."

"First jag," he said. "First one ever."

"My first one too. Quite fascinating."

"Do you have to be so bitter?"

"Poor Harry, should I say?" Her voice was cold and pitiless.

He had done something unmentionable, Harry thought, because he could remember Christian weeping, yet talking in her limpid sobless voice. "Did I make you cry?" he asked.

"No," she said. "You never did and never will."

"Once you did cry long ago," he said. "Do you remember?"

"No," she said. "I do not remember. Now let's deal with all your stinking bottles." He could hardly believe such language from Christian, the fair, gentle, terrifying woman. "You love pistol practice at lizards, and similar bravura. To pour away your liquor would be much too tame. Outside to the veranda, Harry. Go on out!"

She was hard on him, not even helping when he stumbled. She lined the bottles up, and then she brought his automatic pistol. "Shoot them!" she said. "Go right ahead and shoot your friends."

It seemed a bit ridiculous, but he went right ahead and shot them at about ten feet. The bottles disintegrated. She took away the pistol. She brought sunglasses for him and sat beside him on

the other chair. "Tell me what happened, Harry," she said in her own soft voice again.

"The tiger came the wrong way round from Rimli," he said, "and just at that moment I was thinking of you. All I did was fire toward Ranipur and scream my head off."

"Bapu said you frightened the Bad One by roaring more fiercely than the Bad One. Cheddi Khan translated for me."

"Did he translate that I was paralyzed with terror? That Bapu had to take the rifle out of my hands and guard the great brave master until morning? Did he mention my behavior coming down the hill?"

"Poor Harry," Christian said. "Have you never been afraid before?"

"Of course," he said, "but not panic-stricken to a jelly." He shivered.

"You can fail like anybody else," she said, less kindly. "It was high time that you did, and now you have."

"Only thing I hadn't failed in," Harry said. "Don't you understand?"

"I might understand," she said. "But I can't sympathize. If you cared about a battle then you always won it. If you didn't care about it then you didn't let it be a battle. Very easy, very arrogant and selfish. Now you're finding out the facts of life."

So hard on him. "I've even made you hate me," Harry said.

The wind had dropped to a dry stirring, to a flip and a flop of the great leaves of the teak. The brain-fever bird was calling. *Brain-fever,* quietly, wheezingly. *Brain-fever,* louder and higher. *Brain-fever,* querulous and mounting. *Brain-fever,* up up up, insistent to its broken peak of desperation.

Tiger, Tiger — Burning bright — In the forests — Of the night — What immortal — Hand or eye — Could frame thy fearful — SYMMETRY?

"I can't," said Harry Black. "I can't face it, Christian."

But when he turned, he saw that she was weeping. He had been provided with a silk handkerchief by Cheddi Khan. He gave her that.

"You must. You must, Harry." She dried her tears. "Such an

idiot. I'm going home. I have three sleeping powders in my bag inside. Eat something, Harry, and take two, and go to sleep." She looked at him. It was a hard and level glance. "Can I trust you by yourself?"

"I don't know," he said.

"Promise me."

He did not promise.

"Promise me!"

"All right," he said. "I promise." And there was a grievous thing: "Can't ask you to forgive me."

"I think we both might ask forgiveness," she said.

Chapter Twelve

THAT NIGHT a boy was taken in a village in the lower forest, from the high-walled pen where he slept among his goats.

"Why was I not told sooner?" Harry said the next afternoon, secretly thankful that he had not heard the news before.

"The Lady Sahib said that Your Honor must be left to sleep."

To sleep a jag off by command of Mrs. Tanner! The famous steady hand shook worse than Miriam's on a Sunday morning.

"There is more to tell, sahib," Cheddi said. "It concerns Bapu. There is danger now for Bapu. This morning as he went to track the tiger from the village, men lay in wait for him and stoned him, and Bapu fled, firing a shot over the heads of the villagers to halt them."

"Was Bapu hurt?"

"He was struck by a stone and bruised. There is this also about Bapu: Last evening, we followed the Memsahib's motor to the forest gate. As we were returning, Bapu said: *I hear the janwar speak. Leave me in the jungle.* I left Bapu in the lower jungle, and it was before the time the boy was taken. I have told this to no man. Sahib, I do not believe these jungli fears, but there are strange things about Bapu."

"Are there not strange things about all men?"

"That is true," said Cheddi Khan, carefully and coldly.

"From tonight Bapu will sleep here in this house. Tell him my order. Go now to the Range Office and ask Tara Singh when the forest elephant will come. Say this from me: *I have spoken once about the wicked guru and shall not speak again.*" He went to the bookshelf. He stared at the books. "What was this you said to me, that the Memsahib did sweeper's work?" No reply. "Speak, Cheddi Khan."

Cheddi spoke.

"Oh, no," Harry said.

"Sahib," said Cheddi with compassion. "A strong man may be weak."

He found a bit of paper and wrote on it: "I'm sorry, Christian," and put the paper in an envelope. "Take this to the Memsahib."

"*Jawab hoga?* Will there be an answer?"

"No," he said.

It was dusk when Cheddi Khan returned.

"The elephant will come tomorrow morning. Sahib, Tara Singh was much afraid at hearing the message of the guru. He does not plot against Bapu now. I am sure of this."

"Did he not lie as to the killing Ranipur-side?"

"There is hatred between Sikhs and Muslims. Yet I, a Muslim, tell you that he is innocent of this also. The first message from Ranipur was mistaken. Sahib, you are a man of justice."

"All right, all right," he said in English.

"The Lady Sahib was waiting in the bungalow at Bondha, and after reading said: *Thank the sahib,* and went away."

"How did the health of the Memsahib seem?"

"The Lady Sahib was pale," said Cheddi Khan, "not light of heart, as is her wont."

The forest elephant did not come next morning, but Harry had learned long ago to close his mind to frustrations in India. He wished to use the elephant to follow the trail on level ground, where the kans grass was tall. He dared not go on foot.

"The Bad One is in the lower forest," Bapu said. They scoured the lower forest all that day, driving, stopping while Bapu searched for tracks. Bulbuls sang cheerfully at open places, and dappled chital fed below the trees where monkeys berried. Some jungle

dwellers worked by day; some slept against the coming of the night. But the tiger — Is the tiger sleeping? Is the tiger watching? Is the tiger waiting for me in that withered grass above the track? Hurry, Bapu, inscrutable small man.

That evening they dragged a sack behind the car, for three miles along the main forest road. It made a swath of comparative smoothness to show tracks in the ruts and dust. The dust was deep, fine as talcum. A panther crossed it that night, a python, a sloth bear. But no tiger.

The elephant still had not arrived. This was Harry's third day since the Lady Sahib had cut him off from his bottles. He was eating largely now. He had stripped the plaster from his ribs. The scars were healthy, although tender.

"Sahib," said Bapu in the afternoon. "The motor gharry does not serve well to search the lower forest. Could Your Honor walk a small distance with Your Honor's hand upon my shoulder, down the large rao by the water hole and to the forest road? Four furlongs only."

Bapu and Cheddi Khan knew that he could do this. They were pinning him down. "We will try," he said. He felt chilled at the thought.

"Go slowly, sahib," said Cheddi Khan. "I shall be waiting at the crossing of the rao." He was treating Harry as a kindly trainer treats a gun-shy pup for which there may be hope.

They started down the dry rao. It was a wide watercourse and pretty safe; but he could have used a nip. Life is hard, he thought, his hand on Bapu's shoulder. Life is far too complicated for a little man who knows himself.

Then Bapu's shoulder was no longer there. Bapu had vanished. The reason showed itself: a party of peasants, thin-shanked plainsmen armed with lathees, panting in the heat of afternoon.

"What is it, my brothers?"

They had heard the car. One of them was the man who had lost his son to the tiger. They were after Bapu, but they did not dare say his name or the name of his other self, the tiger.

Harry spoke gently to them, soothing and cajoling. When he judged them softened from their dangerous resolve, he made a

joke. They laughed. He then blistered them, warned them, made a second jest, and they went home. He thought it might be all right for Bapu till there was another human kill.

The voices dwindled. "Bapu!" he called softly.

Bapu emerged from a hiding place in the tangled flotsam left in the rao by the rainy season. Bapu trusts me, Harry thought. They went on down the middle of the rao, with thirty yards of safety either side, to the water hole, a stagnant puddle, and beyond the bank was dusty jungle of high trees and low bush cover. Harry hoped that Bapu would not find the pug marks of the tiger.

But Bapu did. "Sahib," he said in his sepulchral whisper, "the Bad One came down the rao last night and drank and went on yonder." He made his graceful sweep of hand over the lower reaches of the Rimli salient, a labyrinth of forest with many tiger places.

"I am weary," Harry said. "Let us rest a while."

They sat back to back on a boulder. A hornbill dipped and flapped its clumsy way above the trees. "Bapu, I have thought that we might close the Pass of Rimli with a great explosion. To this end, Tanner Sahib will bring with him a box of dynamite."

He wondered how Bapu would react. He thought: I might have given up this tiger. But now I can't. I cannot face it and I cannot leave it. Why play at being superman? I've lost my nerve. Well, look at all the other chaps who lost their nerve.

Bapu fidgets. He is horrified. I thought he would be.

"Oh sahib," said Bapu in cracked distress, "if the Bad One is denied its road to Ranipur, then surely the people here will kill me. The Bad One waits for me and yet I do not fear the Bad One. Sahib, I fear the wickedness of men." Bapu trembled against Harry's back.

"I do not understand this, Bapu, that thou fearest men yet not the tiger." In his mind's eye Harry saw it stalking on its belly. He saw the bloody jowls. He trembled too.

"The sahib has the hard way of the soldier, knowing fear and courage, and understanding all things."

How delicately he imparts his little dig at me.

"Bapu," he said. He listened to the wind and watched its caprice

with leaf and dust and arid grass. "Bapu, hast thou seen a tigress playing with her cubs?"

"Yes, sahib, I have seen this many times. It is a thing most sweet and beautiful to see, the tigress and her little ones."

"Was thy Bad One born at Rimli, Bapu?"

Bapu's back was absolutely still. "Sahib, I think that this is so."

"Bapu, thou art a wise and clever man, surpassing all the janwar in thy knowledge of the janwar. Didst thou not see the Bad One's mother cuff the Bad One with a fierce mother's pride and love, and then give suck?"

There was a silence of the two men in the loudness of the wind, and now another sound came through the loudness of the wind. It was periodic — short blast, blast, blast of the hooter at the sugar factory. It was imperative and urgent. It said *Alarm* as unequivocally as an air-raid siren. The two men stood up, and hurried back down the watercourse, the large man leaning on the small man.

Cheddi waited with the old rattletrap in the shade. "This is a fire alarm, sahib, is it not?"

Harry did not know. He drove at fifty miles an hour along the Bondha road. When the jungle thinned, he saw a gleam. A fire? No, it was the tall metal chimney of the factory at Bondha. Here was the forest gate, now open land. No smoke, no fire.

Christian, Superintendent Johnson, servants, Doctor Roy Chowdhury M.D. and the groom were all clustered about the Arab pony Adonis, which was in a sweat.

Michael had ridden at four o'clock. He had started his usual circuits inside the garden wall, trotting and cantering. The groom had watched a while, then gone back to the stable. Christian had been sleeping. Michael and Adonis were last seen trotting fast, by the lower road toward the River Garda. Adonis was next seen coming at a gallop from the forest gate. Babel, talk, confusion. Christian was quiet, watching Harry.

"I wonder if he could have gone to look for that big crocodile we saw together?"

She nodded. "Might," she said.

The bloody little fool, he thought. Can't blame him, just the sort of thing I used to do. Runaway horses take the short road

home. This pony might have taken a short cut from the crocodile place clean across the Rimli forest to Bondha. "Bapu, hast thou seen the tracks of a shod horse galloping? Fresh tracks?"

"Sahib, I saw this in the rao as we hurried from our sitting place to the motor gharry."

He looked at Christian. He thought that she could take any truth she had to take. "I think he went round to look at that crocodile. I think the pony got out of control and made straight for home. Michael might have been dismounted. If so, he's walking home. Or he fell off on the way. Johnson, you look round to the river side with Cheddi Khan. Bapu and I will go in the factory Land-Rover to the lower forest, and then on foot." *On foot,* he thought, in the dark forests where the tiger moved last night.

"We need one more man to hold the torch." *I can't,* he thought.

"I will come," said that funny little doctor. "I personally will come with pleasure." Never set foot in jungles in his life. Good for Doctor Roy Chowdhury M.D., the only volunteer, it seemed.

"No, Doctor. You must wait here in case the others find Michael and he has been hurt," said Christian quietly. "I'm going."

"I said a man," Harry said.

"He is my son," she said, "and I am going." She wore her tartan shorts, unsuitable jungle garb. She was a phenomenally cool woman.

He got into the Tanners' car, with Christian and Bapu and the Bondha driver. Johnson and Cheddi followed. He stopped at the parting of their ways. He noticed that Johnson was in a stew. He addressed himself to Cheddi. "If you find Michael, blow the horn again and again. If you do not find him, try to work along the rao to where you waited with the car before. Then listen. Is it understood?"

"Sahib, it is understood." And Cheddi smiled.

Harry drove on.

"I shouldn't have slept this afternoon," she said. "I never do. But I was so tired. And I should have guessed, because he kept on asking when you would come; he thought you would take him to the crocodile place again, and so few days left, and I was cross with

him at lunch today. Oh dear, is there anything I don't do wrong?"

The boy; the thought of that bright-hearted boy.

"You do nothing wrong," he said. He put his hand on her hand for a moment, the first time he had done such a thing, and this was to give comfort and to take it from her. Harry Black was much afraid. He took his hand away.

They were in the forest now in the warm moment of the sunset. He stopped where the Rimli road turned right, and the lower forest road went straight ahead. A jungle path bisected the angle of the roads: a narrow, jinking path. The thought of walking it in daytime would suffice now to make him sweat.

Bapu found the tracks at once. "It is as we thought, sahib. By this path the Bondha horse has come."

Parakeets were screaming in to roost, ones and tens and hundreds, to perch, to rise again, to twist and wheel and stoop with wild abandon. "Stay here," he told the Bondha driver. "Keep the headlights burning. Keep the engine running."

"Sahib, I fear to stay here in the jungle."

"Safely in a motor? The Memsahib does not fear to walk into danger. What art thou, a man?" And what am I? he thought.

"Should we shout for Michael now?" Christian asked.

"Not yet. Bapu will read the tracks. He goes first with the small rifle. You go second. Your job is to shine the torch out where I tell you. Go quickly, Bapu."

The parakeets were settling now to sleep. Night hurried in. He followed Christian, the three of them in single file and close together. Cheddi and Johnson would soon be at the Garda River. Would he hear the old rattletrap's horn? Oh God, he pleaded. Please let them find him now before we reach deep jungle in the darkness. Was that? — He whipped round. Nothing.

Bapu led at a slow walk. The forest on either side was leaf-carpeted and noisy. "Right." She swung the torch quickly round, centered on a pair of eyes. She held it steady. "Civet," Harry said. He heard his voice crack up. "All right."

Her eyes flicked round to him, then on to business, lighting Bapu. What could have possessed him to let Christian come? She was frightened now.

They had come halfway now. Halfway, he thought, and all the trouble is ahead, all the small ravines, all the close cover waiting for us. And Cheddi has not blown his horn. Harry stumbled. He fell against her, and she caught him. He was abominably tired and lame. "Hand on my shoulder," Christian whispered, and her scent came close to him. He put his left hand on her shoulder. It fitted on the roundness of her shoulder, firm. She touched his hand with hers; the palm of her hand was wet. She took her hand away, and they went on.

Bapu stopped. He went a few yards on, and then came back. "Sahib, the Bad One has come to here. The Bad One has chased the horse and then gone yonder." He waved to the right.

It could catch any horse. Christian's shoulder trembled in the hollow of his hand. Her child, her only son, had ridden that horse this afternoon. He squeezed her shoulder. But it was no good. He was terrified. He could not think.

Bapu moved again. "Here the Bad One came onto the path at great speed from the left side, and here the horse came onto the path from the right side. The Bad One's charge failed here. The

horse must have swung from the path and swung back. There is a likely place where the path goes round the banyan tree. There the Bad One may have lain in wait, and there the horse may first have seen the Bad One, and there the Baba may have been thrown down." *Baba,* he said. The baby. Her ewe lamb.

"The Bad One left the horse," continued Bapu, dispassionately.

"What does he say?"

"He says it may have happened just ahead."

"Can't we call?" She waved the torch all round the haphazard wall of jungle, silent bush and silent tree and broken grass.

"Bapu, should we call the Baba now?"

"Sahib, if the Bad One is here, the Bad One knows that we are here. Call, therefore!"

"Michael!" she called. "Michael, darling!"

"Michael!" he called like a crow. "Michael, boy! It's Harry."

Nothing.

"Quickly now, sahib!"

He was not able to go quickly. But he went, leaning on Christian's shoulder. The torch showed the banyan tree, a giant, fifty

feet across a base of trunk and bough and flying root, noble and grotesque. This was the place that Bapu meant.

Christian's shoulder heaved at the sound of Michael's voice. "Tiger's here," it squeaked from somewhere in the banyan tree.

Then Harry heard another sound, and his horrors left him.

"To the right!" he said.

The beam centered to the sound as he brought the rifle up, as the tiger turned away into a gallop broadside across a gap in undergrowth, jazzy amber, jazzy black. He fired. He saw its hindquarters slew. The tiger broke silence in the failing clamor of the shot. It roared, splintering the forest in the night. Many of the jan-war called in witness to the fury of the tiger's passing.

"Hit him too far back and low," said Harry. "Well, I couldn't help it." He sat down. He was tired.

"The Bad One has gone far away," said Bapu. He took the torch from Christian, shone it at Michael up the tree, and went over to the place where the tiger had been.

Christian stood beside Harry as he sat. Her hand felt from his farther shoulder lightly to his face and to his brow. He rested his head against her. He was happy.

"Michael!" she called. "Are you all right?" Her fingers played in Harry's hair.

"My hip's awfully sore. I fell on it." The boy was whimpering.

"Tell us, Michael," Harry said.

"I saw the tiger beyond the tree, and then Adonis did a shy, full speed, and —"

"Darling," Christian said, "start at the beginning."

". . . So we went very slowly up a deep place to the riverbank, and I peeked over, and he was there, Harry, an absolutely huge croc. I watched him for ages, and then I was going to shout to wake him up but suddenly Adonis backed and sort of spun and knocked my cap off and we came galloping back along this path and I was tired out, and I seemed to see the tiger and be on the ground and be climbing a rope thing in the tree all at the same second," said Michael in a torrent and drew shuddering breath. "It's jolly lucky I can climb a rope."

"You never said a truer word, chum," Harry said. "Nor never

will." He put his arm round Christian. "It's all right now," he said to her. "It's quite all right."

"I hate it, oh I hate it." Her fingers played lightly and desperately in his hair.

"Then I heard the tiger in different places round the tree, and once I saw it watching me, and I remembered Plain Harry said tigers don't climb trees much, but I was scared stiff. . . ."

The tiger could have jumped that height, let alone have climbed to Michael up the staircase of a banyan tree. But this tiger had been fired upon from other trees.

"Then I saw a moving light, and the tiger growled like a rumble very close, and I heard you call me."

Bapu was returning. "Help me up," Harry said to Christian.

But she did not help him up. She bent and found his lips to kiss them, and went away without helping him at all.

"Sahib!" began Bapu.

"Tell me later of the manner of the Bad One's wounding," Harry said. "Art thou sure the Bad One has gone far?"

"Sahib, listen to the janwar speak along the way to Rimli."

It was beyond the range of Harry's ear.

"I hear a chital," Michael said. His voice was almost normal. He had talked his fear away for the present, even if all his life he might see a tiger at a banyan tree. "Can I come down, please?"

Bapu helped him.

Harry cupped his hands. "Cheddi Khan!" he called.

"Huzoor!" it came back, a full-throated Cheddi holler. Harry laughed.

"Forgotten you laughed like that," Christian said. The torchlight let him see her staring at him, but he did not think she saw anyone or anything much at the moment.

"Come on," he said abruptly. "Let's get cracking."

Bapu led. They reached the rao and saw Cheddi's lights. "Tell me now about the Bad One," Harry said to Bapu.

"Sahib, I found a tuft of the pale inner hair. I found much blood. I think the bullet struck high in the right hind leg. This is a severe wound, but it is a wound from which the Bad One might recover. Sahib, this is my poor opinion only."

Harry accepted the poor opinion. "With me there is no whisky-wine, but with the Memsahib there might be a bottle from which thou hast earned three mighty sups tonight."

Bapu cackled.

Michael said, "Please, could we go and find my cap down near the croc place?"

"Home now," Harry said. "We can get it later on."

"My proper velvet hunting cap. It's a crash helmet too. If I can't have that, I don't want to go home to England even."

"Now stop it, boy," he said. "Get in."

They got in the car and started back by the lower road to Bondha. "You'll stay for supper, won't you?" Christian said politely from beyond Michael in the left-hand seat. "Cold chicken and potato salad. I should have said cold scrawny bantam from our bazaar." She started laughing uncontrollably.

No one else laughed with her. Johnson said: "I say, now, Mrs. Tanner." Cheddi tutted anxiously. Harry stopped beside the Tanners' car. "Christian," he said, "tell your driver to follow us."

"You tell him. You tell everybody what to do. Oh dear, how funny!"

"Joke over," Harry said. "Now tell him."

Which Christian did, and sat quietly thereafter. They were part way across the open land to Bondha when the old rattletrap gave up the ghost, as she did occasionally; full speed, full stop.

"Bapu will hold the light," said Cheddi, "and I will make repairs." He was an indifferent mechanic with boundless faith in his own abilities, a born wrecker. "Sahib, you must go to Bondha and take food now for your strength. Also, the Lady Sahib is fevered in her mind and needs Your Honor's care." My honor's care, Harry thought.

They dropped Johnson at his bungalow.

"My bruise is sore," said Michael, getting out, "but I'm not the least bit sleepy. I can stay up for supper, Mummy, can't I?"

"No," she said. "You can't stay up for supper."

"Michael," Harry said. "You're a good tough chap, but you've been a silly little boy today. A spank and into bed is what you deserve."

"A beating, not a spank. His father isn't man enough to beat him. Beat him, Harry, go on, beat him."

Michael looked at them and ran away, limping, small and forlorn across the veranda and into the bungalow.

Harry went over to Christian. "You shut up!"

"I won't shut up. It's all your fault. We were happy till you came. We were. We were. Oh Harry, what have I said, I'm sorry. I am so sorry, Harry."

Doctor Roy Chowdhury M.D. came bustling with his small brown bag. He darted a glance at Christian. "Sit down, madam," he commanded, not humble in the least. "I will give mild sedative."

"A sedative?" she said, shaking her fair hair which was dusty and had lost its sheen, but it suited her unruly too. *"A sedative?"* She stared at Harry, then at Doctor Roy Chowdhury M.D. "No, thank you very much. I'm perfectly all right. But could you come and see Michael when I get him into bed?" Christian went away.

"I think she is all right now," Harry said. "It seemed to happen just like that."

"Shock," said Doctor Roy Chowdhury M.D. "What do we know of this? We know the chemistry, the physics of humanity, oh yes indeed, whole global poppycock and atom bombs we know. But the mystery of Mrs. Tanner snapping out of it by free will, now do we understand such things, tell me, Mr. Black, I ask you? The strong are strong and the weak are weak, we say. The good are good and the bad are bad, we say, all such sort of fiddlesticks. And when I, personally, look into beastliness of self with intentions nice and wicked totally mixed up and actions unforeseen, I know we are merest Doctor Babies in the Wood."

Harry laughed. Doctor Roy Chowdhury M.D. giggled gleefully.

"But Mrs. Tanner, a brave Christian lady aptly named, although I am a staunch Hindu, of course — she is proof of human pudding. Everyone loves Mrs. Tanner. Now, Mr. Black, what of your gallant self? Let me examine you below the light. Disrobe. Upper clothing only."

He obeyed. Doctor Roy Chowdhury M.D. much admired his scars, and inquired about ribs and head, all of which had ceased being troublesome. "You have taxed your system many times too

much, hard-living and quick-healing, oh it is phenomenal, and I am proud of you. Your body is sound now but for this old peg leg, as you call it. Your spirit, Mr. Black?"

He met the wise, sad, muddy eyes of Doctor Roy Chowdhury M.D. "I'm troubled in my spirit," Harry said.

"Ready, Doctor," Christian called, and she came out. She laughed, her own gay laugh again. "What a place to choose!" But she stared then at his chest, and her hand rose from her side and dropped. "Oh," she said. "My poor Harry."

Harry put his bush shirt on.

"Drinks in the sitting room," she said. "Will you have one?"

"I don't know. What would you advise?" he asked Doctor Roy Chowdhury M.D., who knew about jags and all the rest.

"I personally am teetotal, but gluttony and other fleshly lusts abound in me. Do I deny them altogether? No, I indulge moderately. Drink therefore, Mr. Black, and sparingly, is my advice. But if it must be alcoholic tubs, then take the pledge now, once for all. Mr. Black, you are my hero absolutely."

Harry went into the sitting room, with its reproductions of Cézanne and Renoir, nice rugs of second quality, simple furniture: a lived-in jumble of good taste adapted to the budget. I could give her so many things, he thought.

There was a gramophone. He got a drink and listened to a symphony of Sibelius for a few minutes, until the doctor left, and then he went to say good night to Michael, drowsy in his bed.

When he came back, Christian said, "Desmond has sent word that he's flying up tomorrow. I'll send the car for him early in the morning."

"Any word about the job?"

"Everything fine here, he says. Don't you think we'd better eat?" She stopped the Sibelius, and they ate cold chicken and potato salad without conversation, and went outside again.

"If Cheddi doesn't mend the car," she said, looking at a light which came and went across the plain, "what then?"

"I can't stay here," he said. He looked at her and she looked at him. It was dark, but not too dark to see each other.

"No," she said. "You can't stay here."

"Michael's cap. It must still be at the river. Shall we go and have a look?"

She stared at him. "Is that what you want, Harry?"

"Yes," he said. "That's what I want. What matters more is what you want."

"My wants?" Her face crumpled to the smile, *gamine,* so unexpected in her thoughtful face. "Would they be influenced at all by yours?"

They went in the Bondha car. It was half past nine. Something had happened since night began three hours ago. He drove fast to the light where Cheddi worked away.

"Sahib, after half an hour it will be ready," Cheddi said.

"Good," he said. "The Memsahib and I, we go to seek the cap beside the river. Wait for me at Bondha."

What was time to Cheddi Khan and Bapu, half an hour or half a warm night through?

He turned left to the main road before the forest, then across country to the river. No one else was abroad in the Indian night.

"You must be very tired," she said.

He was, and the throttle was in a bad place for his leg. "I am a bit."

"Let me drive then. Stay in, Harry, and I'll come round."

He stayed there, and she came round. "Well?" he said.

"Can't you stop asking me?"

He kissed her the first time for the blessing of their being together. Then they kissed each other. "Did you know you kissed me in the forest?"

"I didn't mean to do it. But I'm not sorry. I'm not the least bit sorry."

"Chowdhury said that your snapping out of your hysteria was the mystery of free will."

"The mystery of more than I could bear. We tried. We tried so hard again."

"You did, anyway," he said. He moved over, and she drove.

"Too many things have happened to us — too many straws, to the last one in the jungle when I knew you were afraid, and I was

terrified, and you made yourself go on. I thought then: This isn't the disillusioned he-man who softens me against my will. This isn't the man who couldn't take it when he failed. This is my own brave Harry, and I don't care — Michael, Desmond, what I believe in. I'm sorry, God, I just don't care. That's why I cracked up, I suppose, and said those cruel things, like *we were happy till you came*. Please forgive me, darling."

"It's true," he said. "The sad thing is it's true."

"You tried as hard as I did. You never like credit for being good. You don't believe in virtue, do you, darling?"

"You made me go on this evening. You, not me. How can I look down on virtue? But good-by, virtue. *Laugh together in the night.* Do you remember?"

"Don't you know a woman would remember? That same evening after you had caught the train, my mother said: *If you're going to be a true wife to Desmond, you must never see that man again.* Then she said: *Silly girl, you're not the only woman in the world this ever happened to. You know what is right, dear child. Besides, it's more beautiful to win against it.*"

"Go on," he said. "Talk to me, my darling."

"This once," she said.

He did not speak. He thought that what was said and done between them would be said and done for always.

"In her last letter Mummy wrote about you. She said: *Dear Harry Black, I think of him so often. I hope he gets better quickly and can take a nice long voyage.* She said that, meaning: *Get him out of there before my prophecy comes true.*"

"Desmond. Did he guess?" Would Desmond be surprised to know that I am taking his wife to the banks of the River Garda, and the moon is coming up?

"I don't know, Harry. He trusts everyone, me most of all. But he watched you drive off that last evening, and he said: *There goes Harry Black. He likes to think he goes alone.* And Desmond looked at me as if he knew quite well. If he was mean and selfish, it would be less bad. You do like to think you go alone, though, darling."

"Go alone away from you? God knows, I don't."

"For a confirmed atheist, you invoke the Deity a lot."

"Who said I was an atheist? For God's sake don't start that again."

She sat back, with her bare arms straight to the steering wheel, and laughed at him until he laughed at himself. The wandering moon rose now to dim the stars of Indian night. They came to sands between the river and the forest, a tranquil desert of the moon where life and love might trespass at their peril.

"You drive all right one-handed," Harry said. He was learning the other hand now, finger by finger, line by line. "I can never close my eyes to see your face. But I can see your hands and think about them, beautiful and kind to comfort me."

They crossed the rao. They had reached the place where the cap must be — hoof marks in the riverbank. While he watched her, she searched, with the red handkerchief tied over her fair head, the white blouse, the dark shorts, the bare legs. "Are you sure this is the place?"

He switched off the engine and the lights and went over to her. "Quite sure," he said. "It must have been just here."

"We won't find it. I know we won't. And people will think we didn't even look. I know what people are thinking about us."

"What does it matter what people think about us?"

"You don't care. You're a lone wolf having fun. But me?"

Her mouth was near below his mouth. His Enemy said to him: You know that she has known one man only. There is still time, Harry Black.

Go away, he told his Enemy.

Fireflies glowed and went out across the river. Jackals howled in the moon-secret land.

"Peace, my darling. Peace I never knew about. Peace and not alone."

"Not lonely and alone," he said, "the miracle with you." He kissed her on her left cheek and her right cheek, on her brow, and they were quiet. Time was not before. Time would not come after.

It was midnight by the River Garda. He drove her home.

"I've always been afraid of India," she said. "Liking things

about it, hating it. I wonder if your mother was afraid? I wish I'd known your mother, darling."

"Yes, and my father would have liked you. *Damn fine girl, that,* I can hear him say it. I've been thinking lately what I missed about my father. We were too different, I suppose, and I was too arrogant to see. But my mother — my mother could laugh at me as you do."

"If I could look after you, and be your slave, to keep you in my heart forever, even hurting me, it wouldn't matter. Now I see why women live in shacks with husky drunks."

He laughed. "Not so husky at the moment, but a veritable drunk."

"No, darling, not a drunk. You can beat that. I was watching you this evening. Was it nice for you to be afraid at last and beat that too?"

"It put me in my place," he said. "I'm still afraid, and now I know it." He saw the wounded tiger waiting for him. "I've learned so much from you," he said, "about trust and other things I lost, my darling Christian."

"I don't know," she said. "I don't know any of the mysteries. Shall I repent this morning when I wake up to remember you with me? Just once, I thought, to say good-by, and be a true wife always after to my husband. But I was wrong. Did you know that I was wrong?"

He was ashamed. He could not lie to Christian. "Yes," he said. "I'm afraid I knew."

"An episode for you, and off to hunt that animal tomorrow."

"Please don't," he said. "That isn't true."

"It is, my love," said Christian close to him. "It's true about you that you never give yourself."

"My old Colonel said that to me once."

"He was right. You live for Harry Black, and I am what you want, and the tiger's what you want."

"I've always had a one-track mind," he said. "I've never had a two-track mind before. I find it most confusing." His heart was full and penitent and grateful. He kissed her as they bumped across the moonlit land of bund and ditch, wheat ripe now for the

harvest. "The tiger is the episode," he said, "and when I've killed it, tigers are over."

"After that?"

"Would I see you in England?"

"I don't know," she said. "Don't ask me now, my love."

They reached the Tanners' bungalow, where Cheddi Khan and Bapu waited with the old rattletrap ticking over to display a cure.

"The Lady Sahib and I searched long and carefully and did not find the cap."

"Salaam, Cheddi Khan," Christian said. "Salaam, Bapu. Sleep well, Harry." She went slowly up the steps.

"We will find the cap," said Cheddi Khan. "My-kell must wear this cap when flying in the air machine to Blighty. The Lady Sahib would wish it so."

Cheddi Khan, Bapu and Harry went back to Rimli.

Chapter Thirteen

He drove the main forest road after dawn next day. The season of lush grass and pools was over now at Rimli, and animals must travel far to eat and drink. Soon forest fires would start, amid intolerable furnace winds.

He thought of the monsoon far away; and he thought: Whatever I may do, or whatever may be done to me, I shall not see the rains this year.

Bapu found tracks on the road. The tiger had crossed here. It had moved on three legs, dragging the off hind leg as Bapu had divined. Bapu followed the trail for a hundred yards to muttee — baked mud, hard as stone — and there he lost it. The tiger had entered the upper forest. Had it stayed, or had it crossed over the pass into Ranipur again?

The elephant, called Begum, which had been positively due since four tomorrows, arrived now on the fifth. With it they searched the Rimli horseshoe to the ravine where he had pinned the tiger and would have killed it but for Desmond's foul-up. Then I would have gone away, he thought, and this thing with

Christian would not have happened. Nonsense. It was ordained to happen.

Bapu slid off the elephant pad to search. He came back, round-faced, enigmatic. He put his bare toe into the proffered foothold at the tip of Begum's trunk, and the elephant swung him up to sit with Harry on the pad, and lumbered on again. Bapu and Begum were old friends.

They climbed to the apex of the horseshoe, and stopped below the Pass of Rimli. Bapu slipped off again. His hand touched Begum's trunk in passing, and the tip curled round to nuzzle him. Bapu climbed the red rock. Harry waited. He was here, but he was by the river with his love, with comfort and peace.

"Sahib, the Bad One has not gone to Ranipur."

The elephant and the three men moved down below the western ridge. Was there a change, a tenseness in the shamble of her gait? They approached the bathing place of the elephants, where they had sat that murky morning before he shot the other tiger. The Elephants' Pool had shrunk to a pothole. The wild elephants had left Rimli for the high cool lands.

Begum balked below the bank. The mahout dug her with the metal ankus, one vicious downstroke. She hissed, and climbed. "There is a bad scent here," the mahout said. "She is not happy."

Bapu searched about. "A panther," he grunted.

Harry went round the pool on Begum. He could see well enough from ten feet up. He saw the splayed pugs of an old male panther.

Bapu came to stand below him. "Sahib," he said. "There are no pug marks of the Bad One here."

"Mount then, Bapu," Harry said. And while Begum swung her old friend Bapu up, he looked at the red cliffs of the Rimli horseshoe. He screwed his eyes against the glare. He was getting hot, figuratively, in the sense of Hunt-the-Thimble. *You're cold. You're warmer now. You're hot.*

For he had just seen a fresh and good impression of the near forepaw of the Rimli man-eater, the scar diagonal across the basal pad, in the crusty ooze beside the pool. He had caught Bapu in a flagrant whopper.

"Oh sahib," said Bapu, "the Bad One must lie yonder near another drinking place." He made his graceful sweep of stubby hand, toward the whole jigsaw of the upper Rimli forest.

"Yes," said Harry. "We shall go there in the afternoon." And he thought: I must be careful. If I so much as hint that I am on to Mr. Bapu, then Mr. Bapu will take off.

They went back to the resthouse. He drank fresh lime with wind-chilled water from an earthen pot. He had some food. He lay on the charpoy bed, while a boy pulled a rope on the veranda, and the punkah creaked overhead. It was the ancient India. He slept.

He was awake before the airplane flew overhead. He hopped across the room and outside. It was Rabat's high-winged monoplane, painted blue and silver. Harry had flown with him in Delhi. Rabat buzzed the resthouse, wagged his wings and flew south for Bondha, where they had a landing strip of sorts.

Harry hopped inside again. He was elated at the thought of seeing Rabat. He strapped up his leg, and was dressed almost as quickly as a whole-limbed man. It was ten past three.

"Take Begum to the river. Let her bathe. If I do not come there by one hour before the sunset, then return."

"Sahib," said Bapu. "I go to seek the Bad One in the upper forest."

"Kabardar," he said. "Be careful, Bapu. The Bad One is thrice dangerous now wounded. Carry the small rifle."

"I shall be careful," Bapu said. He stooped to lay his forehead on the rubber toe of Harry's jungle boot. "My father, my protector," Bapu mumbled, took the rifle, and was gone with mystery.

"Sahib," said Cheddi Khan alone. "There is grave distress in Bapu's mind. I have been watching him."

"I know this," Harry said. He told Cheddi Khan about the pug mark at the pool.

Cheddi shook his head. "These jungli people, they are not like us. Sahib, you are fond of Bapu, but you must beware of him."

Harry started the old rattletrap up, and drove to Bondha. This was the first hundred-degree day. There was a difference when

it passed blood heat, a buffet and a nastiness, growing to the next difference at about a hundred and ten, which burned on lips and into lungs. He thought: The daffodils are out now in England.

Rabat's plane was parked in the shade of the mango at the garden wall. Michael was prowling round it, while Rabat stood with Christian on the porch. "Harry! Oh my Lord, I am so glad to see you."

"So am I," said Harry, shaking hands. "Hullo, Christian."

"Hullo, Harry," Christian said. She smiled at him, calm and unchanged from other days.

"You look well," he said to Rabat, "more prosperous and satrapish than ever." Rabat wore his greenish uniform of drill, serviceable and immaculate, a soldier in the eyes of any soldier.

"Shall we go inside?" Christian said. "It's reasonably cool."

Harry watched her bring Rabat ice-clinking nimbu pani. "You?" she said to him.

"Please, Christian." And he thought: Overcasual, undercasual, it can't quite be done. "Rabat," he said. "Thank you for rallying round when I was damaged."

"What did I do? Bring a few medicines. Desmond and Mrs. Tanner were the guardian angels."

"I know," he said. He knew that well.

"And from what Mrs. Tanner tells me, you have been paying back your guardian angels, rescuing Michael in the jungle."

"How is Michael?" He clutched at the straw of Michael.

"The doctor gave him something, and he slept till noon. Stiff and sore, but all right. Really, children are amazing, casting off their horrors when their horrors are so real."

Yes, they really are, he thought. And which or what is real? Are we quite real here to Rabat with his Hindu sensibility?

Christian's eyes met Harry's eyes again. Her eyes were dark blue and deep. He looked away.

"Whence, portly Brigadier, and whither?"

"I have been to Dehra for inspections. Now I must fly on to Delhi. I came to inspect you too, my friend, and you are in fighting form, I see. The face has again the lively look I used to know. We were together, Mrs. Tanner, in some wild days."

"I know," she said. "He's told me all about you."

He, she says, not Harry. "Now you're here," Harry said, "I can make use of you to fly me over Rimli. Say fifteen minutes?"

"*Make use of me.* That is all these English do. You are Canadian, Mrs. Tanner. Am I not right about this?"

Christian smiled, but did not speak. She wore a dress this afternoon, a print of green and white. She sat with her legs twined in that woman's way, one foot behind the other ankle. She is not the same, he thought. And I am not the same. Is it wrong that love is right for us? He looked at her, and she at him, and he felt Rabat watching. Why hide the beauty of this current flowing to and fro between them in the room? We must, he thought.

"Well, let us go now for this fifteen-minute flight," Rabat said.

THEY TOOK off and made a climbing turn to Rimli. Rabat was a competent and cautious pilot. Harry looked back at the Bondha garden. Michael was waving a white handkerchief, but Christian did not wave.

"Where do you want to go?"

He put his mouth to Rabat's ear. "Up the line of the left-hand ridge, as low as you can manage."

"The bumps will be terrific."

The small plane bounced in sympathy with each change of land below. There now was the main forest road, the resthouse, the Range Office, the upper forest laid out for inspection. Harry leaned to the right-hand window, and now the updrafts of the red rock oven tossed the plane.

He saw the summit of the ridge two hundred feet below, the cliffs dropping a thousand feet to the glade where he had sat out a thunderstorm one night. He saw the small circle of the Elephants' Pool. What was that? But it fell behind.

He waved his hand to the right, and Rabat turned.

"Too high," he shouted. "Could you run it down the other way, close against the cliffs, about a hundred feet above the jungle?"

"Do you want to kill us?" Rabat circled. The Pass of Rimli danced in a haze of heat. "Is this important, Harry?"

"Yes. I must have just one look."

"The thermal currents . . . Well, I will try it."

Rabat dropped the nose and made a gliding turn.

"Closer!" What Harry wanted to inspect was the rock face above the Elephants' Pool. "Closer!"

Red rock. Jagged rock. Polished rock. Rock unbroken. Then he saw it.

He placed it precisely in his mental map — a quarter of a mile, two furlongs, upridge from the pool. He saw something else, movement at the edge of a bamboo clump, a man running, a face staring up. Bapu's jungle lore did not include concealment from the sky.

The thermal struck them. It whipped up the starboard wing, down the port. Full throttle, and full stick. Rabat straightened out. "See anything?"

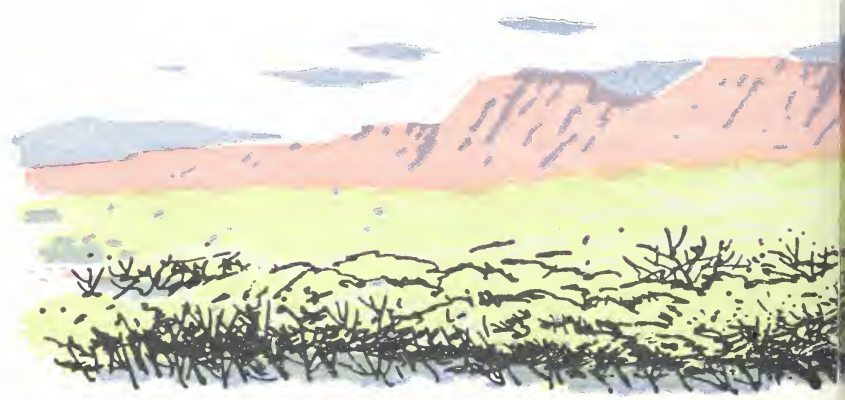
Harry told him what he had seen, and what he thought.

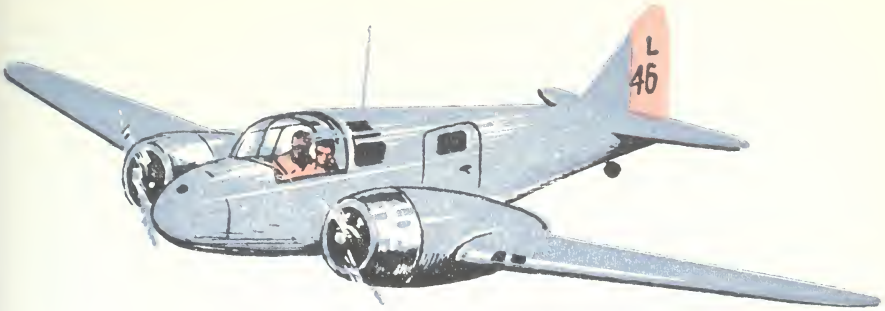
"Be careful," Rabat said, as Cheddi Khan had said. "These primitives like Bapu are not funny with their bogies."

He landed and taxied into the wind to Bondha. "Harry," he said. "I have brought you much trouble with this tiger. I am afraid that I was wrong, perhaps, persuading you to hunt it."

"Man-eaters are always troublesome, this one rather more so. I'll get it now, I think."

Rabat was embarrassed, not his ebullient self. "But there is other trouble I am fearing, and if I am your friend I must say this to





you knowing it is none of my business and I may be wrong, but Desmond is a good chap and a closer friend to you than I am. I am sorry, Harry, if I offend you."

Harry knew with what reluctance Rabat would mention such a thing. He was not offended, but he was not swayed. "I know," he said. "I know, Rabat."

"Then be strong of heart," said Rabat in stentorian tones again. "And good luck to you, tum Bluddiful."

"If and when, may I come and stay with you in Delhi?"

"Have I not said my house is yours? Must you insult me by this question? Get out now, for I am late. My apologies to Mrs. Tanner

for not saying good-by in person. Remember me to Desmond."

Harry got out. He waved as Rabat taxied down and ran her up again, a careful pilot who took a risk for him. *Remember me to Desmond* . . . Harry walked back to the bungalow.

Michael was riding round the garden. His face was tight.

"I thought it was best, Harry, don't you think, bruise and all, to make him?" Christian asked.

"Yes," he said. "I do." And he thought: She is unselfish even in denying her own fears for her only child. "That boy has guts," he said. "Which is not surprising." He smiled at her, but she was watching Michael.

"Rabat sent you his farewells."

"I'm sure he's a good man's sort of man, but I find him rather overpowering like a hearty bear."

"He was on to us in no time flat. A hearty bear, but acute."

"He wouldn't have to be acute," she said. "We can pretend after this."

"There are limits to pretending," Harry said.

The tea came, and she poured it out. It was his own best green-tip tea. "You've spoiled me for ordinary tea," she said, and bit her lip, and they watched Michael in the withered garden.

"I was thinking," Harry said, "the daffodils must be coming out at home. Haphazard, round about the grass, and under trees. Do you like them too?"

"I like them best of all flowers," Christian said. "Carefree daffodils that die before the summer. You don't have to ask me what I like."

"I know, my love," he said. It was the saddest and the happiest thing he knew. "You've been with me all the time, ever since I left you, sleeping and awake."

She moved in her chair and did not speak. Another day was fading to another night. The brain-fever bird was calling: Question, fevered question, no answer to the question.

"I must go," he said. He should have gone before this to see Bapu. "Shall I come back later on?"

"Take Adonis round now to the stable, Michael." She put the teacups on the tray. "No," she said. "You mustn't, darling."

"When shall we meet? I've got to talk to you before you leave."

"Not tomorrow."

He said, "What time will Desmond arrive?"

"About six. Dear Desmond, what have I done to him? What kind of woman am I?"

She said it quietly. There was nothing he could say to her in answer.

"Bapu didn't get his promised drink," he said instead. "Could you let me have a bottle, Christian?"

"Of course," she said.

"I'm going to buy it," Harry said. "How much?"

"Twenty-nine rupees twelve annas, but you're not. My one and only present." But she added: "Up to now."

He had another thing to say: "Desmond is buying me some dynamite, which I think I'll need. Can you get him to send it over with your driver first thing in the morning? Not bring it up himself. The thought of . . ."

"I know," she said. "But the one thing he will want to do is take it to you himself."

Harry rose as Michael came through the house.

"You always seem to go just when I come," Michael said.

"The tiger's wounded, darling," she said gently. "Harry has to go. Let's wish him luck."

"I'll say it in my prayers tonight," said Michael.

He went his way to Rimli. Dust was his companion. He thought of the daffodils that die before the summer.

"Oh Bapu, take one sup of whisky-wine; then tell me of thy doings."

Bapu produced his aluminum cup from the recesses of his gray tweed jacket. He swigged down the whisky and looked slightly less lugubrious. "Sahib, I went by the Chilwa pool, by the five anthills. . . ." Bapu's description was of a half-mile circle, midway in the upper forest, between the Pass of Rimli and the resthouse. "The Bad One is there. The peacock, the langur, the kakar, the chital, and many others of the janwar say this."

"Hast thou searched elsewhere this afternoon?"

Bapu was squatting on his heels on the matting of the resthouse floor, swaying back and forward slightly. The rhythm of his swaying broke and then went on. "No, sahib. For there I heard the janwar speak."

"Oh brother, dost thou put thy trust in me?"

"As in no man," Bapu said. "The sahib was true to me when wicked men wished to kill me. Also," continued Bapu pensively, swaying on his heels: "Also, the sahib walks with the wild things in his heart. Has the sahib not spoken of those days of hiding in the foreign jungles when the small mouse and the large deer knew that he was one with them, and warned him of the coming of his enemies? The great hunter has been hunted.

"Sahib, in my days of trouble, when I left my people, I lived with the janwar in the jungle." Bapu waved his hand over his shoulder, general direction southeast. "Sahib, the wild things in this jungle have protected both of us. I knew this from the first moment of our going together in the forest. There has been beauty in this thing for me, and comfort in trouble."

"For me also there is the beauty and the comfort of this thing that we have known that all men do not know." Harry stood up and closed the double doors behind the unrolled screen and sat again. "Oh Bapu, we are alone in this house, and no man may hear us if we speak of secret things."

Bapu's eyes flickered to the outside door. He squatted, thighs flat against calves on his spade-ended heels. No, Bapu, Harry thought, you are not going to take off for parts unknown. "Bapu," he said slowly. "This secret of ours, is it as beautiful as that thing most beautiful to see, the tigress cuffing her little ones with a fierce mother's pride and love, then giving suck?"

Bapu sat still, looking at the floor.

"Thou hast spoken of trust in me, Bapu. But thou hast lied twice to me today. I saw the Bad One's pug mark at the pool. I saw thy face from the air machine, and thy face was not in that part of the jungle of the five anthills. Thine eyes looked up from a place above the Elephants' Pool. Oh Bapu, my brother whom I trust, why hast thou not told me long since of the secret place where the Bad One now lies wounded?"

"Sahib," said Bapu. "This has been a grievous thing to me." The little man began to sob croakingly without restraint. Harry sat easy in his chair, his pistol in his trouser pocket. Bapu would neither run amuck nor run away now that he was weeping.

"Tell me of this trouble in thy heart that we may share it."

Bapu told him. His people did not worship images and idols, as did the Hindus. His people built no temples. Sky, land and water, birds, beasts and men, trees and flowers of the forest — these were the many temples of his people, and God dwelled equally in all of them. There were sacred places for the worshiping of god-in-all and all-in-god, and these places were in the deepness of the forest, and the knowledge of the sacred places was the oath of manhood, secret and inviolable.

"Oh sahib," croaked Bapu, "I was an exile from my people, and a stranger here at Rimli, and I sought my holy place to be secret from all men. I found this place on the cliffs where rock wraps rock, and a passage turns within it in secret to an open place within the rock. Sahib, no man but I has known this place where I have worshiped alone with God. Eight cold weathers back, I went one morning to my place which was trodden neither by men nor by the janwar, and at the entrance I found the pug marks of a tigress.

"Sahib, it is a blessed holiness with us, that the greatest of the janwar should bring forth her little ones in our most sacred place, and my heart was full of joy. The entry to my sacred place was now denied me, but there were holes and cracks for climbing on the inner wall where rock wraps rock. There I looked down upon that thing most sweet and beautiful to see, the fierce mother and her cubs, and this Bad One was the strongest and most playful of the three, the favorite of his mother.

"Sahib, the mother was shot in the Rimli forest, and one of the sisters was called to mating in the jungle, and the other sister was killed at Rimli. Only the Bad One stayed and grew to strength; and the Bad One's cubs were born in my holy place also. In the last April moon, the Bad One was wounded; and only then, by the wickedness of cowardly men, did the Bad One become the Bad One.

"Sahib, in all other places do I hunt the Bad One and would

kill him. But the Bad One has the safety of my holy place, and the Bad One waits for me. This I know. Also, in the telling of this secret, even in the telling of it to the Bara Sahib Bahadur, have I betrayed my God. Does the sahib now understand my grief?"

"Brother, I understand this. But, oh Bapu, would thy god-in-all not say that the Bad One now sins against the god-given habits of the tiger?"

"Sahib, this may be true." Bapu no longer cried. He stared at Harry.

"Would the god-in-all not say that the lesser wickedness would be the killing of the Bad One in thy holy place?"

"Sahib, this may be true. The wisdom of God is hidden from us."

"This holy place of thine," said Harry carefully, "would be an opening within the horseshoe ridge. Oh Bapu, wilt thou show me the outside of thy holy place? Wilt thou take me there tomorrow in the morning early?"

"That I will do, sahib," Bapu said.

"Is this a promise, Bapu?"

"Sahib, this is a promise."

Harry stood. He poured whisky. "Tilt well, then, brother," Harry said. "Let these be two mighty sups."

Bapu tilted the cup well.

"Sher Bahadur," Harry said. "Brave Tiger, I salute thee."

Bapu wept again, but now with smiles to catch his tears. "Oh sahib, I am an exile from my people, and I have betrayed my holy place. I know now why the Bad One waits for me."

"I will protect thee from the Bad One." But he saw the wounded tiger waiting in a cave for him as well as Bapu.

"Oh sahib, through these bad days there has been a hope in me that I might go with my father and protector, that we might walk together in the jungles of the sahib's own land, and there I would serve the Bara Sahib Bahadur. But this is foolishness, I know."

Bapu flying to England. Bapu stalking in the Highlands. Bapu beating out a pheasant cover.

Tears grew up to blur Harry's eyes. "Oh Bapu," he said. "Foolish men might hold thee foolish."

Chapter Fourteen

THEY SAID that hours of dreaming happened in a second. He put out his arm to put it round Christian Black. His dreams rolled on. He walked with Christian's hand in his. He had given her a brooch made of a certain tiger's bone, and she was very pleased. . . .

That dream was the reality. This charpoy cot, at five a.m., the illusion. Harry thought: Dillydally, shilly-shally, not meeting things head-on. I'm a head-on meeter, aren't I? Let me be one, then. I here and now dismiss my conscience with a hearty kick. The honest thing is that I can't do without her. The honest thing is that I can be a better chap because of her. The honest thing is that I am not ashamed of what I'm going to do to Desmond, my old friend who has been most kind to me. And yet another honest thing is to admit that my old friend willy-nilly has become my enemy.

Desmond wouldn't take to drink. He wouldn't take a bullet to himself. He would go on being good. And is Michael going to suffer? No, he certainly is not.

Then Harry thought of his most humble, secret hope: that a child might come to bless them.

Knock, knock. Cheddi, with morning tea and chota hazri — a small breakfast of one banana, two biscuits.

"Salaam, sahib. Bapu has gone one hour ago, leaving this message: That he will await you at the Pool of Elephants at dawn. Sahib, it is not wise to place your trust in Bapu."

"Oh, nonsense," Harry said.

"This is my opinion." Cheddi Khan went out.

The Bad One. Was he never to be rid of it? Was it ordained to wait for him, to haunt him till it killed him? Was that to be the ending of the melodrama? His private doom bells rang loudly again for him.

He shaved and dressed. He heard the old rattletrap ticking over. He went out. The sky was reddening above the eastern ridge.

Harry and Cheddi Khan drove past the Range Office and slowly up the forest track, nearing a tryst with Bapu at the dawn. "Keep the small rifle," Harry said to Cheddi. "Go back to the resthouse and there await the Bondha driver with the dynamite that Tanner Sahib has bought for me. Drive as if thy newborn son lies sleeping not to be disturbed. Sound the horn on reaching the Elephants' Pool and wait."

"Sahib, I am anxious about this Bapu. Let me come with you."

"No," he said. "Bapu has made a promise to me and will keep his promise. These are woman's fears."

"Bapu took the ancient gun," said Cheddi, patiently.

Harry turned the old rattletrap round, ignoring him. "If Tanner Sahib should himself come, say that thou knowest not where I have gone. Then come thyself." He thought: No more foul-ups thanks to Desmond Tanner, thank you very much.

"But even I do not know where you plan to go. Your Honor, I must know where you will be this morning."

Harry gripped the wheel against his old black tantrum.

Cheddi Khan got out. He walked slowly round and opened Harry's door. "I am sad," he said, but he was angry, "that after these many years you do not trust me. Therefore, Your Honor, I can no longer serve you."

"Don't be a fool. Have I ever failed to trust you?"

"Never until now. Sahib, you are not yet strong, and there are troubles in your mind. I, bluddiful as I am, know this. I fear that harm may come to you from Bapu or the tiger. Therefore, you must tell me where you go this morning."

Cheddi's right, he thought. "I go to a place in the western cliff, two furlongs from the Elephants' Pool." He pointed to that section of the ridge. "To a cave where the tiger lay yesterday. This was Bapu's secret. You will tell it to no other man. Is this a promise?"

"It is a promise. God be with you, sahib."

"And with you, my brother."

Cheddi ground the gears and went.

Daylight was here, subdued. Harry was almost sure that Bapu would not fail him. Yet he was aware that people who tell holy secrets may do unholy things to get those secrets back.

He had reached his rendezvous with Bapu beside the pool. There was a whistle up the tree, soft and mellow, but it was only a green pigeon. Harry blew a whistle himself, anything but mellow. It echoed into nothing. No answer came. Green pigeons flew away.

The sun was breaking now from the eastern ridge. He made a promise, and he has never failed me, Harry thought. And afterward he spoke of going to the jungles of the sahib's own country. How touching, that foolishness of Bapu's, that he would find his sylvan gods with me, when I am godless, and I feel sin in this way only: that I have made Christian sin against the God she loves.

He went over to the pool. His mind was sharp with trepidation. In the crusted mud he saw the pug marks of the tiger. They were so fresh that moisture seeped into the indentations. An hour?

Still no Bapu. He might have taken off. He might be pinned by the tiger up a tree. *The Bad One waits for me,* he had said — to take him, or for him to give himself in expiation. Even this was possible. Harry looked up to a small ravine running down from the ridge above him. He knew that Bapu's secret place must be somewhere near the head of that ravine.

Sahib, this is not country pleasing to the janwar, Bapu had remarked blandly with a sweep of his hand toward that ravine, on one of the early days at Rimli.

What Harry had planned to do this morning was to go with Bapu to locate the place. Then, if the entrance where "rock wraps rock" was as narrow as it sounded, he could lay a dynamite charge and lock the tiger in. Thereafter, he might climb a bamboo ladder to Bapu's observation post, and shoot the Bad One as safely as any viceroy had ever shot a tiger. The pukkha sahibs might say: *I say, old boy, not very sporting, what?* Well, he was not a pukkha sahib. He was a fearful man with an account to settle and his doom bells ringing.

But now Harry sweated. Whatever the reason for Bapu's nonarrival, he knew this: That he must find the secret place quickly.

He CLIMBED to the upper limit of the grass below the cliffs, and stopped with open ground behind his vulnerable back. In the

nullah there had been no alternative to walking, fast as he was able, below banks where bamboo creaked in the first stirrings of the daytime wind — but not from other stirrings, it appeared.

Now he had to go among boulders, jagged throwoffs from the cliff face. He did not know whether he could get through. He did not know whether he could make himself go through.

He heard a tearing, growing rush, like a jet plane at a certain angle. The vulture pulled out of its superb stoop. It stood on all its brakes of air, leveled off fifty feet or so above the bottom of the cliff, circled close against the cliff, eyes questing downward to a point, and flew heavily away again.

Then Harry saw the place. What had been flatness was now depth, a shadow, a crack in the cliff. It was like a puzzle picture — find the old man's face; and there it is, so obvious, how extraordinary not seeing that before.

That vulture stoop had meant one thing only — food. The vulture had thought better of it. Why? Because something else was in possession of the food? Harry's doom bells sounded now again.

He moved on, picking a way past this rock, and round that. He saw the last open space, the stunted scrub, the cliff. He saw Bapu's ancient gun, a breech-gaping piece that Bapu fired by pulling back the hammer with his thumb and letting go. Bapu's gun lay on the ground. There was a strip from Bapu's gray tweed jacket. There was blood. There were deep scuffings in the sand.

Harry stooped to break the gun. The cartridge case was empty. He put it to his nose. Fired recently.

A shot fired anywhere against the sounding board of cliffs would echo to every corner in the horseshoe. That set a time — the ten or fifteen minutes he had been driving in the clamorous old rattletrap. How long ago? Thirty-five to fifty minutes.

Blood led him. A slit entrance to the cliff, then a U-shaped corridor open to the sky, then a three-foot passageway, tall but roofed over, bending to the left to where the secret open place must be.

Harry stood in the U-shaped bend. His rifle pointed up the inner passageway; the rock floor was smooth and bloody. He listened. He heard human moans.

He looked up. It was quite an easy climb, twenty feet or so, up the inner wall to Bapu's observation point. The footholds were all adequate. He could lock the ankle of his tin leg so that the toe of his rubber boot would not slip. He locked the ankle joint, slung the rifle on his left shoulder, and climbed. He thought of poor old Bapu. He thought of him and Bapu in deck chairs on the boat deck on a slow voyage home. He thought of everything to beat back his fear.

He lay on his left side on top of the ledge. He felt better in a while, and was able to look down into Bapu's secret place, where Bapu lay. Bapu's scalp was half torn off, his body horribly mauled. Bapu moaned, still wearing a few relics of his gray tweed jacket.

It was a circular opening within the cliff, and in the middle of the circle there was a great slab of rock. Beside this Bapu lay. Upon this slab, his holy of holies, were a pine cone from the Pass of Rimli, the golden feathers of a male golden oriole, a mound of pale-brown earth, a clay vessel, a few charred sticks — offerings of living things from land and sky, the earth, the water and the fire.

Bapu moaned. The tiger was not visible.

"Oh, Bapu!" Harry called.

"Sahib," he answered. "Shoot me. Shoot me, sahib!

Once in the war a man wounded in the face had cried to Harry: *Shoot me!* But he had not shot the man, and the man had recovered to be blind. Bapu had had it, Harry thought. But who was he to know?

"Bapu, tell me this: Where is the tiger's inner cave? Is it below me?"

Bapu moaned and did not answer.

"Tell me!" he shouted brutally. "Is it below me here?"

"Ha, sahib." Yes, master. "Shoot me, sahib."

He thought: The tiger cannot be dying if it dragged Bapu thirty yards into here. I could drop a Barking Dog. That might bring the Bad One out from the inner cave below me, but then it would attack Bapu, and Bapu is not dead, and how do I know what Doctor Roy Chowdhury M.D. might not accomplish?

"Bapu!" he called again. "I come to save thee!"

But weakness rose in him and said: *I cannot. I cannot go down*

into that place. Weakness was clever. It said: *The little man is in agony and dying. To shoot Bapu isn't easy. It's harder and more merciful.* But strength said: *Bapu gave his trust to me. Bapu moans down there. I might save him.*

Harry Black went back down to the U-shaped corridor. The bells of doom chimed loudly in the narrow place; but another melody, a godly tune, played too. He went into the closed-over tunnel which led to the open inner place.

He was now at the door of Bapu's secret place: some thirty feet across, and in the center, the slab of rock on which, from above, he had seen the offerings to Bapu's gods. Now the top of that rock was higher than the level of his eyes. Bapu lay against the bottom of that rock, quiet, breathing. The inner cave must be to Harry's left, and that was where the tiger would be waiting. He listened for the tiger. Bapu moaned again.

Two side steps, bad leg leading, rifle ready. The cave was dark. He saw blood on the rock floor at the entrance. Bapu must have wounded the Bad One.

The tiger might be beyond that central rock, or in the cave. He could see everywhere else from here. But blood at the entrance to the cave, and only Bapu's blood trail on the floor. The tiger must be in the cave.

He moved sideways, back protected by the wall, round the circle of the wall. He stumbled once, recovered. Nothing moved in the entrance to the cave. He heard nothing except a light moan from Bapu. Was the tiger dead?

Harry had to leave the comfort of his wall. If he fell, and the tiger saw him fall, and there was any charge left in the tiger's battery, then Harry Black would certainly have had it. He started to cut across to greater protection. He would try to scramble up to sit among Bapu's offerings: not a safe eminence, but at least a sort of castle to shoot down from.

He faced the cave. He had one yard still to go when the tiger broke silence with a short, deep cough, and came, as once before, the wrong way, from Harry's back, from behind the altar rock. I really am a bloody fool, he thought, jumping for the lee of the rock, turning, firing the right barrel, and the stock of his rifle dug

his ribs. With a swipe of a forepaw the tiger batted his prize Purdey rifle out of his hands and against the wall; it snapped in two. He saw the unspeakable Bad One go on past him to its cave. He saw with clarity, with an odd sort of deliberate observation, that the tiger trailed a useless off hind leg, and weaved against a wounded off foreleg. Yet life and hate burned strongly in the tiger, snarling out of sight. It had not touched Bapu in its passing.

He struggled up to sit with Bapu's offerings, his pine cone and his golden bird, his brown earth and his vessel, the charred sticks and ashes of a fire, made perhaps a week or two ago when the Bad One was away at Ranipur.

Bapu lay below him. Please keep quiet, Bapu.

"Sahib, my promise — the Bad One waited for me."

He looked down at Bapu, a bad thing to look down upon. He faced the cave again. "Oh, brother," Harry said. "I know this. Rest well, brave Bapu."

Bapu coughed below. The tiger grumbled in the cave.

"Sahib!" His voice was loud. He sounded like his own cracked self. "My father, my protector. Let my bones lie on this rock within my holy place."

Bapu died. The tiger was quiet in the cave. Harry Black was quiet on his rock.

Time meant nothing much. Fate or luck or Kismet, call it what you will — fate was quite a different matter. Fate was a railway, rolling you along the iron rails, slowing at the wayside stations, slow and fast and helter-skelter to the terminus. The child, the youth, the soldier and the prisoner, the faithless friend and lover, the lover all to no avail, no freedom for the prisoner — well, extinction was a sort of freedom for the prisoner.

Harry Black was an impatient man, going after anything he ever wanted. Just a willful puppet riding headlong on his iron rails. Now he sat quietly and patiently and not afraid. Bapu lay dead below him. Harry heard the wind above his red rock wilderness.

The tiger growled in the cave, and it had moved, and he could see the front parts of the tiger. It watched him. Then it licked its off foreleg. Then it watched him.

I was a fool, he thought. I've always been a fool. My good thing came to me at last. And did I grasp my good thing, to cherish and to hold? No. I had to satisfy my pride. I had to prove myself again, and kill old Bapu in the process.

Fate knocks to say: You and Christian are my playthings. You saw it, didn't you? Be thankful, then. Die easy, Harry.

Yes, he thought. I will die easier for seeing it. But my Christian? What pain will my loving and my dying bring to her?

The Bad One watched him. It neither growled now nor licked itself. He knew it would be coming soon, and its injuries would not prevent its reaching up for him on his six-foot castle. He had a knife, which he would draw. He was alone, and not afraid now at his terminus. He thought of Christian.

The bells of doom pealed now again. The splashing melody played again. He heard a sound. The sound came once and came again, a footfall, stealthy, from the tunnel entrance on his left, half left from the tiger's inner cave. Hope and fear returned to him.

How long since he had left Cheddi? He did not know. Time without hope had been meaningless. Time with hope was now very meaningful. Time now was every fearful second gained, tick-tock. The tiger stared at him, ruffed head low. He stared the tiger out. He might hope to stare it out, until something changed the balance in that brain, that imponderable, smallish, feline brain. His eyes swiveled for perhaps one half of one invaluable second, back again. No tiger in the frame of cave. Is it coming at me? It must have moved sideways or moved back. He saw blackness, empty in the wall.

And now he saw Desmond Tanner in the open place: a lanky six-foot-two of Desmond Tanner; lemon-yellow in the face; carrying a rifle. Then Desmond moved out of his line of sight.

Harry still could not see the tiger. He heard Desmond coming toward the altar. It would have been more sensible of Desmond to go round the wall, his back protected, and the tiger's cave still visible. Instead, he crossed the open toward the altar rock, some fifteen feet from where the tiger lay. The tiger growled.

He heard Desmond breathing back of him now. Harry held

his left hand out to Desmond for the rifle, felt the barrels, gripped them near the point of balance. They were warm from Desmond's hand, and they were shaking from the shake of Desmond's hands.

He waited. Still nothing from the cave. "Get up," he said, and whipped the heavy rifle over to his right hand, to his shoulder, checked the safety catch. "Sure it's loaded?"

"Yes," from behind him, croaked answer to a foolish question.

"How's it shoot?"

"Two inches high."

The tiger growled, but still it did not come.

"O, Sher!" Harry called. Oh, never annoy the terrible beast by saying *Sher,* the beast's own name.

A cough, and into view, and cough again. He gave both barrels to the tiger. It thudded to the rock below him, thrashed about, lay twitching in the flow-away of life. Bapu and his Bad One lay together.

Desmond was being sick.

Harry looked down at the Rimli tiger. He had hated it alive. He hated it now dead. He looked down at the corpse of Bapu. He mourned poor Bapu. He looked up at the red rock walls of Bapu's dwelling place.

Chapter Fifteen

DESMOND said: "Sick as a dog. I'm sorry for that exhibition."

"I've seen worse exhibitions," Harry said. "Thanks, chum. But how the hell did you get here?"

"Christian said you were in a hurry for the dynamite. She wanted me to send our driver, but the man is such a nincompoop. . . . Well, anyway, I was handing it all over to Cheddi at the resthouse when a shot went off. . . ."

It seemed that the people at the Range Office had stopped Cheddi Khan on his return, to ask about an earlier shot. But Cheddi had not heard that shot.

"Bapu, that one must have been," said Desmond. "Well, I extracted all he knew from Cheddi Khan, told him to follow with

explosives, and I drove at supersonic speed. Then I worked along the bottom of the cliff. I never would have found the place except for the mess outside." Desmond shuddered.

Harry ejected the empty cases, and handed over Desmond's rifle, butt first. Polite in action and in speech, he was: a proper gentlemanly scoundrel. Then he looked up at the sky. The vultures wheeled against the dusty blue, close above the red rock cliffs.

"The barrels of your rifle are all bashed," said Desmond, "and the stock is snapped clean off. But I daresay it's mendable."

Oh, damn my rifle. I've killed enough things in my time, Harry thought.

"You look like death warmed up," his old friend Desmond said candidly. "Cheddi will be at the pool by now. Why not go back with him? Just tell me what to do, and I can cope."

"Bapu made a parting plea about letting his bones lie here."

"You mean he was still alive when you got here?"

"Yes," he said.

"Good Lord. I say, old boy, let's go outside."

"All right," he said. He climbed down from Bapu's altar. "Bapu was an outcast from his tribe. We'd better do what he asked."

"Leave him to the vultures?"

"Not if we blow the entrance in. They won't fly in without take-off room to get out again."

"Shouldn't we get witnesses? Our word is not enough, and it would be fairer to old Bapu, wouldn't it, to scotch the rumors?"

"That's a good idea," Harry said. He doubted if the way of Bapu's death would scotch the rumors.

"We'll need some chaps to carry the tiger to the car."

"NO," he said. "I don't want that skin."

"Poor Bapu. I know exactly how you feel."

"You might send Cheddi up with the dynamite," Harry said.

Desmond looked at him. "You're sure you'll be all right?"

"Yes," he said mildly. "Quite all right."

He watched Desmond go. Desmond's lanky lope was a familiar spectacle to him, most welcome to him recently. And he thought, sitting in scanty shade below a thorn bush: The fact that Desmond came and saved my life changes nothing but my estimate of Des-

mond. It doesn't change the situation in the least. It only complicates it. Well, everything is always complicated. The world will say: *Chap saved him. Thanked chap by running off with chap's wife.* The world can go to hell. It was all settled before this.

Harry had tended to waver weakly for a while in there, watching the vultures in the sky. He was strong again. As my Colonel once remarked: *You arrive at the essence of problems with a ruthless dispatch and certainty which is very rare indeed.* It's funny, isn't it, how that sardonic sage is with me after all these years, like a testy old Jehovah. What would the Colonel say, now? Oh, damn the Colonel.

There were no signs of Cheddi Khan, so Harry got up carefully and went to say good-by to Bapu. The sun came into Bapu's secret place now. The wind was strong above.

The agonies of Bapu had been grievous. The sight of Bapu was not grievous, because this was not old Bapu: Bapu of the graceful wave of hand, the throaty cackle, the sups of whisky-wine so delicately hinted at, small genius of the forest with the wild things in his heart. Bapu had gone away, leaving some things about himself that Harry did not understand.

All go unto one place; all are of the dust, and all turn to dust again. Who knoweth the spirit of man that goeth upward, and the spirit of the beast that goeth downward to the earth?

Harry looked at the dead tiger, his last one and his worst one. It was an exceptionally big and heavy tiger. He thought Bapu would have wished to have his Bad One lie beside him in the cave which was its birthplace. *This Bad One was the strongest and most playful of the three, the favorite of his mother.* It was right to leave them here together, turning to the dust again.

"Good-by, Bapu," Harry said, and left old Bapu's secret place.

Cheddi Khan arrived with fifty pounds of dynamite in a wooden box. The carrying of loads was much beneath the dignity of Cheddi Khan, but he would do anything on occasion of emergency. He puffed, mopped his face with the free end of his turban, hung his head, and finally looked straight at Harry. "Sahib . . ." he began his apology.

Harry raised a hand like a policeman stopping traffic. "Tanner

Sahib came here and saved me. This thing is understood. Where are the detonators?"

"Sahib, I go now for these noisome things."

Detonators were loathsome to Cheddi, since Harry had once banged one off to teach him caution. Harry was a fair hand at demolition. He prepared one now.

Bapu lay with his pine cone and his golden bird, his brown earth and his earthen vessel, his blackened sticks and ashes. The tiger lay near him in its cave.

Harry fixed two charges and walked away. He had used all the dynamite. He never did believe in doing things by halves.

Commotion broke the sleep of noon. Some bits of rock flew up and fell. The hot wind carried off the dust. The jungle settled again to the sleep of noon.

"That's that door closed and bolted," Desmond said. "Trust you." They walked down to the car.

"Cheddi can bring the others," Desmond said. "I'll drop you off."

Desmond was stating things, he noticed. "What about your job?" he asked when they had turned onto the forest road.

"It was such a wizard offer that I took it in the end. You'll come over this evening, won't you, Harry?"

"May I let you know? I'm a trifle washed out at the moment."

"I wouldn't wonder," Desmond said. "Come if you can, though."

"I thanked you, didn't I?" he said, going up the resthouse drive in dust and wind, a hateful day, not that a hateful day mattered with the thought of England and the daffodils, and all the rest decided.

Desmond stopped. "Twice," he said. "Hardly necessary. Have I thanked you for going after Michael the other night?"

What was Desmond getting at? "I didn't know you'd heard."

"First item of news this morning. I suppose you were surprised at my own contribution. It was somewhat overdue, but that doesn't mean you have to thank me."

Harry Black got out. "I see the point," he said. He saw Desmond's point about friendship very well. It struck him so sharply in the stomach that he opened his mouth to tell Desmond

what kind of a friend Desmond had, and what Desmond's friend was going to do to Desmond. But he thought: I must see Christian first. Supposing Christian changed her mind?

"See you later, then, perhaps," he said. He watched dust devils swirl the leaves.

"Don't worry, Harry boy," said Desmond. He smiled and went.

Don't worry, Harry boy. So kindly to the foolish boy, the willful boy. And did it mean: *I know?* Did it mean: *I understand your sorrow about Bapu?* Or did it simply mean: *I am your friend?*

Deputations from the villages straggled up the resthouse drive. There were speeches. There were presents. It was quite a gala afternoon. He received milk, butter and goats. He slipped back the goats, thus risking Cheddi Khan's displeasure, for Cheddi Khan was partial to young goat.

This terror of the Rimli people was now over. Their gratitude was sincere. Harry Black was a man of grace with simple people. He adjusted the facts of Bapu's death to make Bapu the martyr, the hero who had sacrificed himself for them. He told the tale of Desmond's courage. He even spoke civilly to Tara Singh. And that at last was that, and he was troubled in his spirit.

He went inside the resthouse, where Pandit Nehru and Mahatma Gandhi watched him from dim portraits on the walls.

"Sahib, the elephant is waiting," Cheddi said.

"Go to Bondha, Cheddi Khan, and give my salaams, and say that I am tired and cannot come this evening. It is understood?"

"It is understood."

"Also, Cheddi Khan, seek speech with the Lady Sahib alone. Say to the Lady Sahib that I shall wait tomorrow from the rising of the sun at that place where the Bondha car stayed on the night of Michael. It is the place where green parrots sleep." He looked at Cheddi Khan, his go-between. "Can I trust thee in *this* matter?"

"If Your Honor trusts me," Cheddi said, "I must be worthy of Your Honor's trust." He left the room.

Put me in my place again, he thought. He took his long khud-stick with the forked end you could use to pin down a snake, and slung his binoculars on his neck. Begum and the mahout waited

for him. The mahout helped him up to the pad. He hung on while Begum rose. They went three miles by the big watercourse to the last steepening below the Pass of Rimli. The elephant knelt again, and Harry got down. Leaving Begum with the mahout, he climbed slowly to the pass, stopping now and then. He went on through the cleft to look for just a minute down into Ranipur. They would have heard the news at Ranipur. There would be festivities tonight. He looked at the abrupt beginnings of The Himalaya. He saw one snow peak in the haze.

He turned back toward Rimli, past the nook where he had spent nine hours waiting for the Bad One on the night of this March full moon, and then had lost the one absolute he thought was his.

He sat outside the pass. The sun was red beyond the red rock ridge where Bapu lay. I fought that battle, Harry thought. I beat the Bad One, didn't I? How sweet the prospect, not in this violent India, but in England, in the pleasant land with comfort and with peace, those things I have never learned about. But I can learn them now with her. Happiness, a silly word, I used to think before I saw that faith and trust are happiness.

He watched the long-tailed parakeets, green against dusty green. He would meet Christian in the early morning, and he would say to her: *My love, we tried our best. We're only human, after all. The thing that happened to us is a good thing, a thing so perfect that we must be strong about it. Say nothing now to Desmond. I will talk to him when you have gone. I'll say to him: Look, Desmond, this has happened. . . .*

Desmond won't make a fuss. He'll say: *I know, Harry. I know you two were really made for each other.* But his speculative look at me will mean: You aren't taking my wife from me to give yourself to her. You are taking my wife from me because you want her for yourself. You've never given anybody anything.

It's true, he thought. All I have ever done is take. And what about those thoughts of mine about things ordained to happen? Wasn't it up to me whether I fought my fear? Wasn't it up to Desmond whether he came into that place today? Chance ordained that Bapu would be killed and I would not be: that I would come to Rimli, that they would be at Bondha, that I would be mauled

by Bapu's Bad One. But chance did not ordain what we would do about it. That was up to Christian and me. It was ultimately up to me. I knew what I was doing to her. and I did it.

Such a charming way of saying thank you. Thank you, Tanners, for your kindness. Thank you for showing me some things I lost, and some I never knew. Thank you for showing me serenity and trust. Thank you for showing me a father and a mother and a son, a family to grace the world. Thank you for showing human dignity.

Down in the forest Begum squealed, one rather girlish elephantine sort of trumpet. Her wild admirers? Harry listened. It was dark. No elephants replied.

It does seem sad, he thought, that the things they taught me in my time at Bondha are the very things I'm going to destroy. *Thank you for my presents. Now turn your pockets out.*

I found my truth at last, he thought. But I have sinned against my truth. Can I have sin with truth confounded?

It's up to me. Oh yes, I know it's up to me. I'm not a monkey. I'm a man. It's up to me if I am strong enough. If I was strong enough, I would pack my bags and go off for good and all, and never waken in the night to put my hand across to touch my true love sleeping.

But I am weak. I am not strong enough to go alone. *There goes Harry Black. He likes to think he goes alone.* He hates to think he goes alone. He cannot go alone.

There were lights now in the Rimli forest — lights at the Katha place beside the rao where a comely girl had died — lights at the native village, where a small goatherd had been taken — lights at the Forestry quarters — lights of the old rattletrap coming through the jungle back from Bondha — lights far away at Bondha where his true love thought of him. Drums were beating for deliverance. People sang and shouted, high and loud. The rhythm of the drums and the cacophony.

Harry sat alone. He watched the stars, the famous jeweled velvet of my India. If I had help, he thought. If only I had help against myself. If Gabriel would come to me as he came to doubting Joseph in the *Christmas Oratorio:*

Joseph: How then am I to know,
Father, that you are just?
Give me one reason.
Gabriel: No.
Joseph: All I ask is . . . proof
That what my love had done
Was really at your will
And that your will is love.
Gabriel: No, you must believe,
Be silent, and sit still.

No, you must believe. Be silent and sit still. Harry was silent and sat still: the soldier and the prisoner, the faithless friend and lover, the lover all to no avail.

He sat alone in the red rock wilderness. "All right," he said. "I'll try."

You are not trying.

"I am. I really am."

No. You are arguing with yourself. Stop arguing, and try.

"I don't quite understand," he said.

You cannot understand with pride.

"I want some help," he said.

Then help yourself. You are a man, the highest of the creatures, and the lowest.

"That's far too difficult for me," he said. "Too complicated."

It is difficult, not complicated. How can truth be complicated?

"I don't know," he said. "I did see truth, though, didn't I?"

You sinned against the truth you saw.

"All right," he said. "I don't know truth."

You know nothing till you give yourself.

"I give myself," he said.

To win and lose and start again each day. Do not think it easy.

"I know," he said. "It's very hard. How wrong I was."

That is better. Now we can begin. Now listen!

"I'm listening," he said.

Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.

"I know," he said.
No miracles.
"I know," he said.
And no rewards paid out.
"I know," he said. "But that's a hell of a lot to ask."
Precisely. And you know that the choice is only yours?
"I know," he said.
Then pray, My child.
He prayed. Harry Black sat still, and he was not alone.

THE REJOICINGS of the Rimli people were now over. It was quiet. They went down in the darkness of the forest. Begum stopped. Her ears went out. The mahout hissed. Harry saw the dark something in the paleness of the rao. He put his glasses up. The tiger stood, looking round at Begum, the tiger and the elephant, respecters of each other's person. *I see you and I hear you, elephant—I scent you and I hear you, tiger.* The tiger went its way, the phantom killer on the prowl, but not a man-eater. *That* account he had squared.

Begum also went her way. A chital called: *KYAA! Watch out!* A general alarm rang through the jungle. Those that slept awoke, and those that fed stopped feeding. They soon fed again alertly. Death is our companion, and so it will go on.

"Sahib, you are late," said Cheddi Khan with kindness.

"Yes," he said. "And we leave tomorrow in the morning early."

"The Lady Sahib said: *Tell the sahib that I will come.*"

"Thank you, Cheddi Khan," he said.

He sat and thought and dozed in the remaining hours of night.

HARRY stopped the car by the forest gate to Bondha. The sun had not yet risen, but the dawn was here. Cheddi knelt to Mecca at his morning prayers, so Harry walked away from him along the lower forest road.

Oh God, he prayed. Give me the strength to do this right.

He had reached his decision as to what to do. Now he was faltering. He needed help. But he was alone again, and he was trying hard to learn to give himself. Was it an illusion, what he had known so sweetly and so quietly there in the night?

Oh God, he prayed anew. Let me give myself to have the strength to do it right.

And he thought: I must play this scene in character. I simply have to be the me she knows, Harry Black, the selfish he-man, who weakened her against her will.

The sun was up. He waited at the forest gate. The mynas chattered and the bulbuls bubbled and the babblers fussed. The small doves dipped about. He heard the squeak of bullock carts and saw the peasants harvesting the wheat. He saw the dust before he saw the pony. Then he saw the golden woman cantering the pony. You know, he thought, in the painful, quiet vision of his mood, Christian could ride a thousand miles alone in beauty through this India and she would never be molested.

"Good morning," they said to each other; salaams between Cheddi Khan and Christian.

"Shall we walk a bit?" he said. He saw her glance at the old rattletrap loaded to the ears.

Cheddi held the pony, and they walked away from him.

"Are you going?" Christian asked.

"Yes," he said. "This morning." Then he told her. He told her perfectly, and in accordance with his old character: that he was most genuinely fond of her; but that his illness and the troubles in hunting the Bad One had made everything between them seem more real and desperate and important than it seemed now that the job was done and the obsession over; and he had done some bad things in his life, and that was just the kind of chap he was, and fickleness a thing about him that he could not help. The theme: I must be cruel to be kind. It's really not my fault I'm so attractive. Let's have no hard feelings, shall we? He did it well, better even than his hopes and prayers, acting the philanderer, Casanova with regrets, and with the delicacy of a gentleman, not saying to a lady that he knows she has lost her foolish heart to him.

"Have you finished?" Christian asked him.

"Yes," he said. He had planted the seed to grow the flower of contempt for him.

"Is this good-by to me, good-by to all the Tanners and away?"

He looked at her, and saw that she was weeping.

"Well actually, yes," he said. "You know what I'm like about good-bys." He looked down at the brown grass before him.

"You're trying to do a good job, aren't you?"

He did not answer.

"Harry darling, there are three of us at Bondha, and love is many things."

"I did my best. I thought I could make it easier for you."

"Dear love," she said.

She dried her tears. They had walked, perhaps, a quarter of a mile. They turned to walk it back. "How do I look?" she asked.

"Well," he said, "a trifle blotched, but quite all right to me."

They laughed at that. They might laugh at anything together.

"What are you going to do?" she asked him.

"I'm going to Delhi," Harry said, "to stay with Rabat. Then to Bombay and catch a boat and sail the seas a while. Then there are things in the world to do."

"I'll pray for you," she said.

"I'll pray for you," he said.

"Pray to God for me?"

"Yes," he said. "A family called Tanner taught me."

She smiled at him. "Now I can bear it," Christian said.

And back to Cheddi Khan who held the Arab pony named Adonis.

"Give us half an hour. It was fried eggs this morning, but we'll change to scrambled in your honor."

He watched her ride away. And then he said:

"Sweetest love, I do not goe,
For wearinesse of thee,
Nor in hope the world can show
A fitter Love for mee. . . ."

"What are these words, sahib, in the English tongue?"

"The poet spoke of love," he said. He wished that he had thought of them before, but now he could not say the words to Christian.

"Oh sahib," said Cheddi in a monotone of pain. "Is it farewell that you are saying to the gentle Lady Sahib?"

"Yes," he said. "And farewell to you soon, Cheddi Khan, my friend."

"Will you not come to Pakistan to stay in my house beside the Jhelum road?"

"Who knows?" he said. "Someday I may come to see you and your sons and grandsons."

"Sahib, I will speak to my sons of you, of a man true unto himself."

"If you speak well of me, speak ill of my sins and anger, Cheddi Khan."

"This I shall also do, for my sons should know that a man comes to his strength through weakness and through sorrow and through ill. Sahib, is this not so?"

"Don't ask me," he said in English. The way to grace was long and hard.

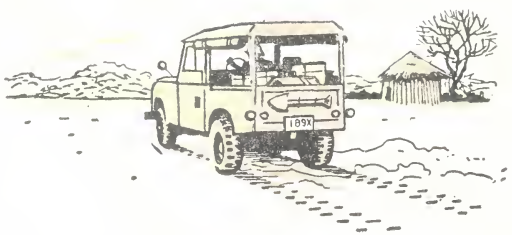
He drove to Bondha after the half-hour Christian had given him. Brown monkeys loped across the road; one small monkey found a dried-up shoot of sugar cane, and nibbled it thoughtfully before the car. Harry stopped. He could not see the monkey very well. "Silly little monkey," he said. "Buzz off."

"Sahib, let me drive this short way."

"No," he said. "You're such a bloody awful driver."

Cheddi muttered to himself. *"Bluddiful,"* he muttered. *"Bluddioffle.* It is always thus."

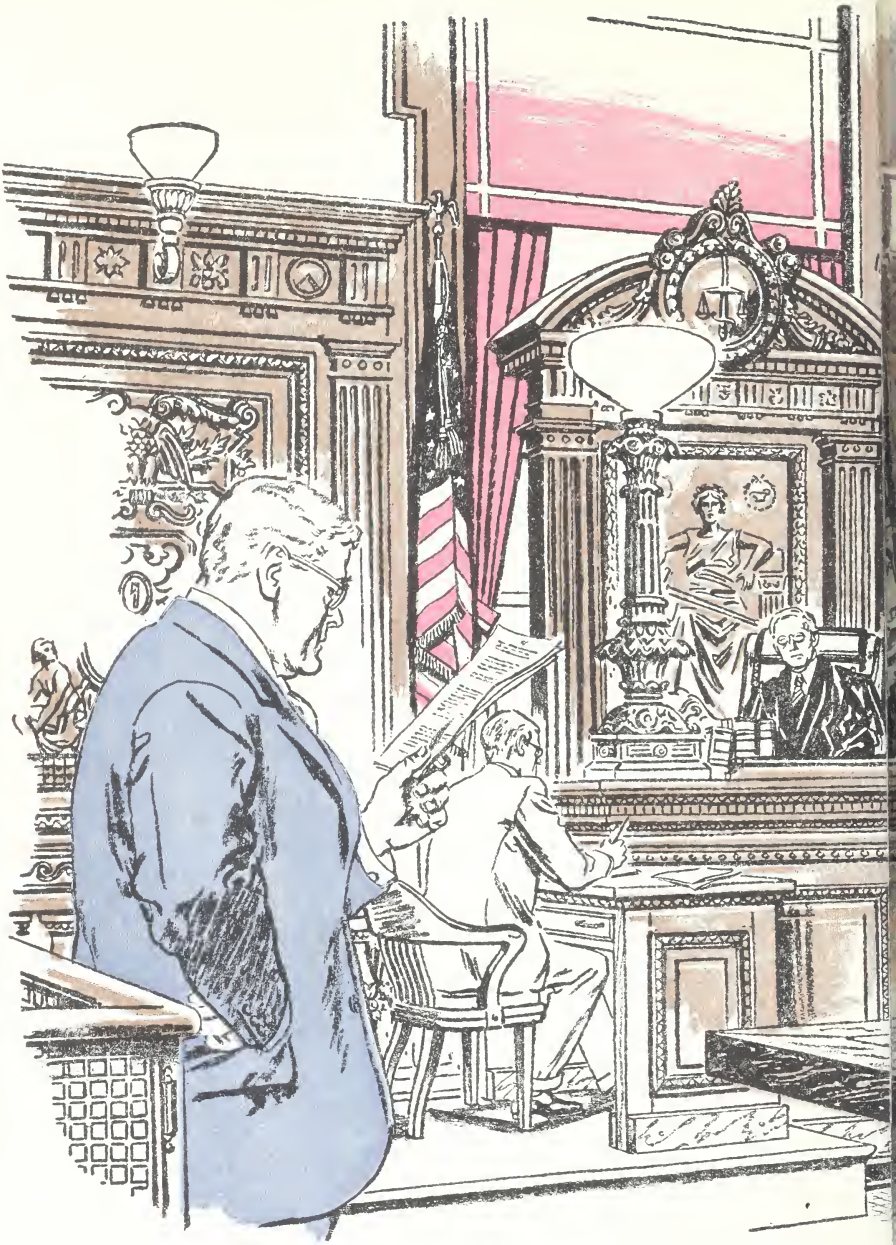
Harry Black had scrambled eggs for breakfast with the Tanner family at Bondha. He parted from his old friend, from his young friend, from his true love.



David Walker

David Walker has lived in all the scenes — and experienced many of the events — portrayed in his growing list of novels. A Scot, he used the Scottish background in his charming best-seller and movie, *Geordie,* and in *Digby* (Condensed Books, Autumn 1953). As a British Army officer he served in the famous Black Watch in the India of *Harry Black.* During World War II, he was a prisoner for five years, escaped three times, and was three times recaptured. In 1946, he went back to India on the staff of the last British Viceroy, Lord Wavell.

After India, Mr. Walker served as military aide to the Governor General of Canada, Lord Tweedsmuir. Here he met and married his Canadian wife. Today, retired from the Army, he lives in St. Andrews, New Brunswick, with his wife and four sons. He devotes himself to a 100-acre farm and a full-time writing career which has twice brought him awards for the best Canadian novel of the year.



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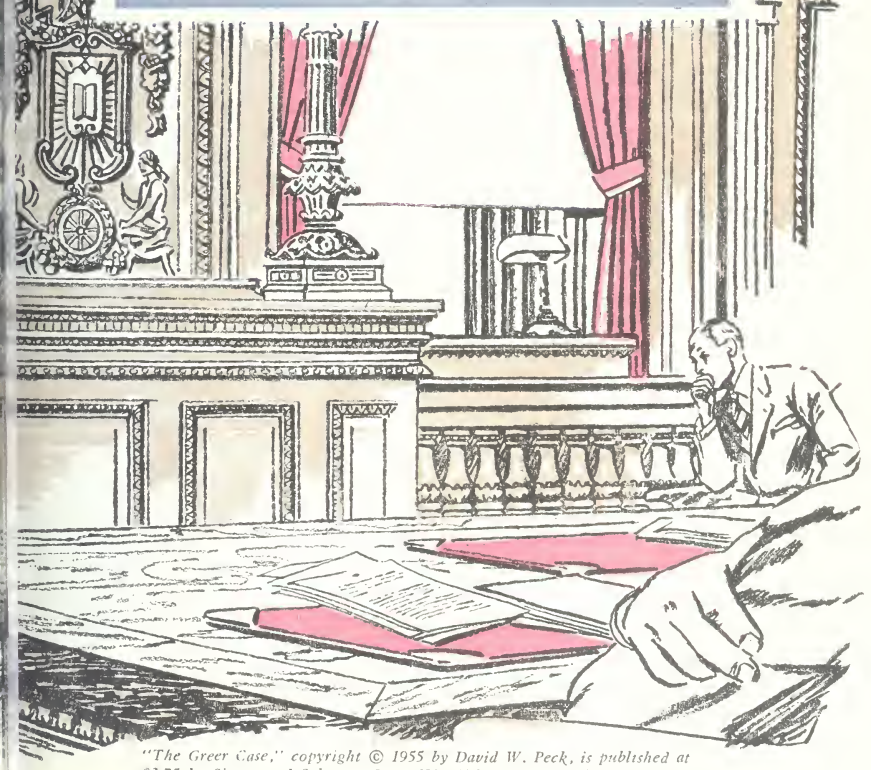
The GREER CASE

A condensation of the book by

DAVID W. PECK



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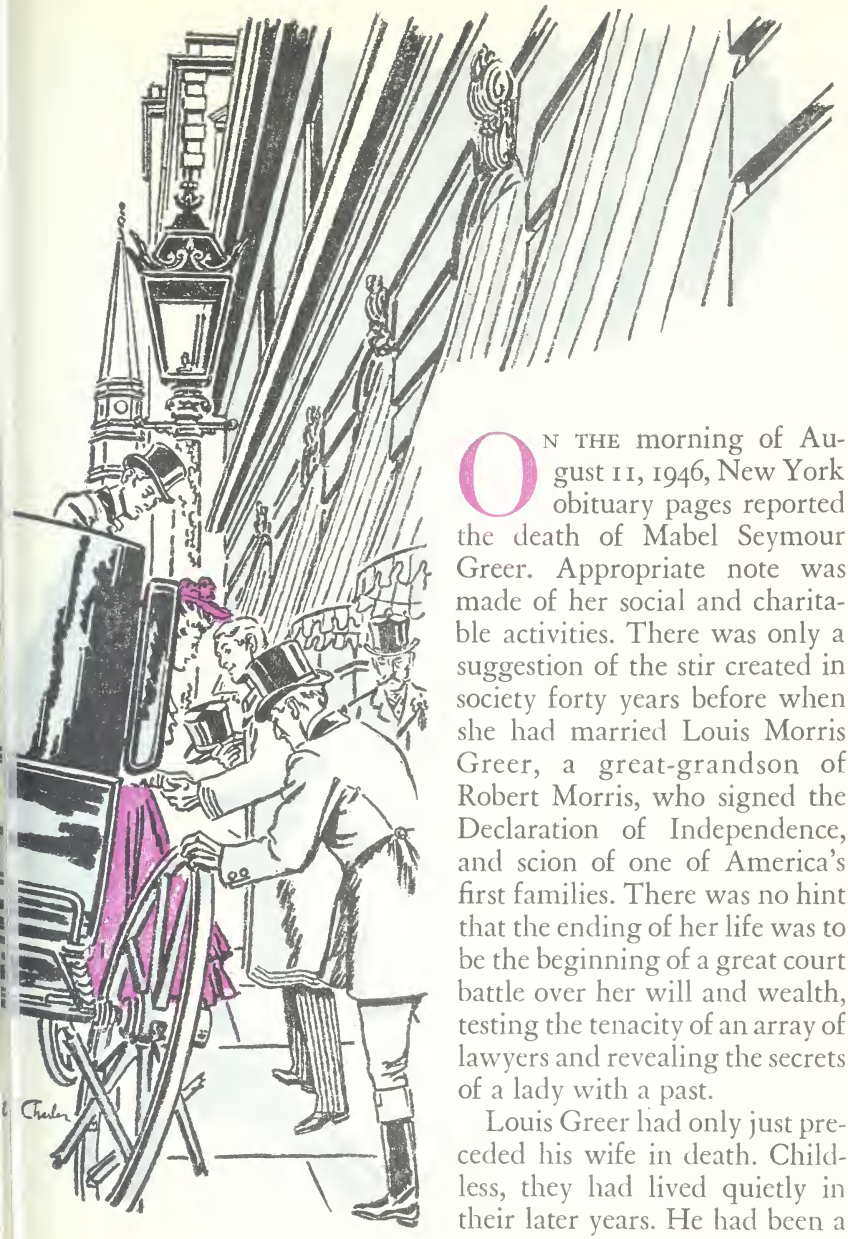
Was Harold Segur indeed the son born out of wedlock whose existence wealthy, fashionable Mabel Seymour Greer felt compelled to reveal to her attorney just before her death?

This true account of the famous Greer case — the contest of a will with a fortune at stake — has all the astonishing twists and turns of the drama that originally unfolded in the Surrogate's Court of New York County. As the shadowed past of a highly respected lady is exposed, more than a story of mystery and irony emerges: behind the courtroom proceedings are apparent the energy and imagination of three brilliant lawyers, matching wits as they search out the evidence.

"... A highly readable real-life suspense story and an excellent backstage view of the law in action."

— *Springfield News*

"... All the joys of a good detective story."
— Sterling North in the
New York World-Telegram and The Sun



On the morning of August 11, 1946, New York obituary pages reported the death of Mabel Seymour Greer. Appropriate note was made of her social and charitable activities. There was only a suggestion of the stir created in society forty years before when she had married Louis Morris Greer, a great-grandson of Robert Morris, who signed the Declaration of Independence, and scion of one of America's first families. There was no hint that the ending of her life was to be the beginning of a great court battle over her will and wealth, testing the tenacity of an array of lawyers and revealing the secrets of a lady with a past.

Louis Greer had only just preceded his wife in death. Childless, they had lived quietly in their later years. He had been a

leader of finance, an executive of the giant utility company which supplies the City of New York with gas and electricity. Mrs. Greer, a large-bosomed, white-haired woman, the image of Queen Victoria, had devoted herself to charity.

An older generation remembered Louis Greer as the exemplar of the elegant age, strolling on Fifth Avenue with his high hat and walking stick. On such an occasion in the spring of 1908, he rescued two lovely ladies from the distress of a carriage drawn to the curb with a broken wheel and invited them to Sherry's for tea. One of the ladies was Mabel Seymour.

She was remembered by those who attended the fashionable wedding that autumn as the girl who came from nowhere and snatched the prize; a girl with a perfectly proportioned figure, a cherubic face, alabaster skin, and a profusion of chestnut hair in a regal coil.

In the circle in which she was to move no one had known her prior to 1908. What Louis Greer learned of her lineage beyond what was stated in their application for a marriage license is not known. A soft English accent confirmed a stated English birth. One would not have been inclined at the time to question her age, stated at twenty-seven.

Few who read her death notice that August morning of 1946 perceived any connection between it and another obituary that had appeared in a New York paper seven years earlier: the report of the death of Dr. Willard B. Segur of Ware, Massachusetts, who for forty-two years had practiced medicine in Ware and the neighboring town of Enfield. He left surviving him his widow, a son, and an adopted son, Harold A. Segur of Worcester.

Unconnected as the lives and deaths of Mabel Greer and Dr. Segur seemed to be, they were vividly linked. Within one month after Mrs. Greer's death the newspapers reported that, just before her death, Mrs. Greer had acknowledged that an illegitimate son had been born to her and Dr. Segur, when they both were very young, and that Dr. Segur had adopted the child. This startling disclosure was made by Mrs. Greer's lawyer in a statement accompanying the filing of her will, which left her fortune to Harvard University, her husband's alma mater.

Soon followed the announcement that Dr. Segur's adopted son, Harold A. Segur, had brought legal action to upset Mrs. Greer's will and claim inheritance of her fortune. The executor of her estate conceded that she had borne a son by Dr. Segur but contested the claim of Harold Segur that he was the son.

Thus the lines of battle were drawn. The trial was headline news for many days, as the wheels of justice ground slowly but exceeding fine.

THE TWENTY-FIRST day of April, 1947, was no different from any other day in the hundred and fifty years that the Surrogate's Court of the County of New York had been administering decedents' estates. The courtroom was the embodiment of unchanging justice. Two stories high, from its red velour carpet to its gold-leaf ceiling, the room was paneled in rich grained mahogany, and embossed on the doors was the scale of justice resting on the point of the sword of righteousness.

On the stroke of ten, the Honorable James A. Delehanty, Surrogate, took his seat on the bench and surveyed the familiar scene of court attendants, lawyers at the counsel table, witnesses and spectators. Venerable and white-haired, learned in the law, searching in mind, he cared for the right and the truth and meant to find them; nothing else mattered.

At his nod, the court clerk rose and called the case of "Matter of Mabel Seymour Greer." Counsel noted their appearances, for the information of the Court, and the lawsuit was under way. It was to be tried before the judge without a jury, and this meant the lawyers would be spared a lot of preliminaries and educational excursions for the benefit of jurors. And because Judge Delehanty was an inexorable and impersonal logician who discouraged all distractions, it also meant the case would be tried with less trimmings than even most nonjury cases. This was made clear at the outset by the Surrogate's invitation to Attorney Lester Friedman to open the case in behalf of the claimant, Harold A. Segur.

"Do you wish to make an opening statement, Mr. Friedman?" the judge inquired. "You can be quite brief, as I am generally familiar with the case."

The stocky contender rose from his place at the counsel table, his flashing dark eyes and firm jaw pronouncing his determination. Lester Friedman had a solid reputation as a lawyer, and this was a case worthy of his mettle. He had spent many weeks locating witnesses to support the claim of his client, Harold A. Segur. And he believed in his case. He had taken it on a contingent basis — the amount of his fee, if any, would depend on winning a sum of money out of which the fee could be paid.

His client had two grounds of attack. One, a woman could not under law disinherit a child and leave more than half her property to charity. A child had a legal right to half the estate. Two, this will might be upset on the ground that when it was made, during the last days of Mrs. Greer's life, she was not in full possession of her faculties and thus not competent to make a will, in which case Segur would be entitled to the entire estate. But the validity of the will was not the issue at this time. First, Segur would have to prove that he was Mrs. Greer's son. That was the question of the day.

Across the counsel table three other lawyers sat in opposition. Raymond Armbruster had a dual responsibility. As the draftsman of Mrs. Greer's will and attorney for the Fifth Avenue Bank, the executor under the will, he had a duty to sustain the will and the bequests she had made. He likewise had a duty to disclose any information he possessed as to possible heirs and to see that the estate he represented was distributed according to law.

Armbruster knew that he was going to be embarrassed in this case. His own statement to the court, when he filed the will, disclosing the existence of a child and indicating that Harold A. Segur was that child, had been the start of the case. Now he was opposing Segur and would be a witness against him. As his own testimony would be an important part of the case, he had decided not to act as trial counsel for the executor but had retained Francis D. Wells of Coudert Brothers, who was seated beside him, for this purpose.

The third lawyer appearing in opposition to Segur was a lean, thoughtful-looking man seated behind Wells and Armbruster — Joseph A. Cox, counsel to the Public Administrator of New York County. The Public Administrator is the official charged with the responsibility of administering the estates of persons who die with-

out leaving a valid will and without readily identifiable relatives. Also, if there is no relative closer than a cousin, he may challenge the validity of a will. If the attack is successful the state takes the property. The Public Administrator's right to challenge Mrs. Greer's will therefore depended on defeating the claim of Segur.

"If your Honor please," Friedman began his opening statement, "Mabel Seymour Greer died in this city on August 10, 1946, leaving an estate of over $500,000, most of which she left to charity by a will which my learned friend, Mr. Armbruster, has offered for probate. The only assumption upon which this will can stand is that Mrs. Greer left no child. Such an assumption is false.

"Mrs. Greer left a son. Not a publicly acknowledged son, because the son was not Mr. Greer's. Indeed, Mrs. Greer was at pains all during her married life to keep her secret from her husband. Nevertheless, she confided to a number of people, her household retainers and friends, that she had a child when she was a young girl and that the child was living. She described that child as having been born to her in Boston, the offspring of a liaison with a college student named Willard B. Segur, who was taking premedical courses at the time, and who later became a prominent doctor and adopted the child. That child, the adopted son of Dr. Segur, is here this day to claim his rightful inheritance."

With dramatic assurance, the claim of Harold A. Segur was thus set forth.

The Surrogate raised the first hurdle. Holding up a piece of paper which lay on the bench before him, he said, "By this paper, sir, your client has waived all claim to the Greer estate. What do you say to that?"

The lawyer was not to be daunted. "I am glad your Honor mentioned that. When Mr. Segur takes the witness stand, he will explain to your Honor the circumstances under which he was prevailed upon to sign that paper: the assurance of being spared the publicity which this case has visited upon him and his family. The assurance failed, and I am confident that your Honor will relieve him from the stipulation. The evidence will establish beyond question that Mrs. Greer had a son by Dr. Segur, and I think we will be

able to establish to your satisfaction that Harold Segur is that child. With your permission I will read the affidavit Mr. Armbruster presented to this court when he filed the will."

The lawyer then read from his adversary's statement: that Armbruster had been told by Mrs. Greer of the birth of a child out of wedlock in Boston and that the child had been adopted by his father, Willard B. Segur; that Armbruster had interviewed former employes and friends of Mrs. Greer who had confirmed the fact that Mrs. Greer had told them substantially the same story. The affidavit continued to the effect that Armbruster had gone to Worcester, Massachusetts, and had there located Harold A. Segur, the adopted child of Dr. Segur, and concluded with this statement:

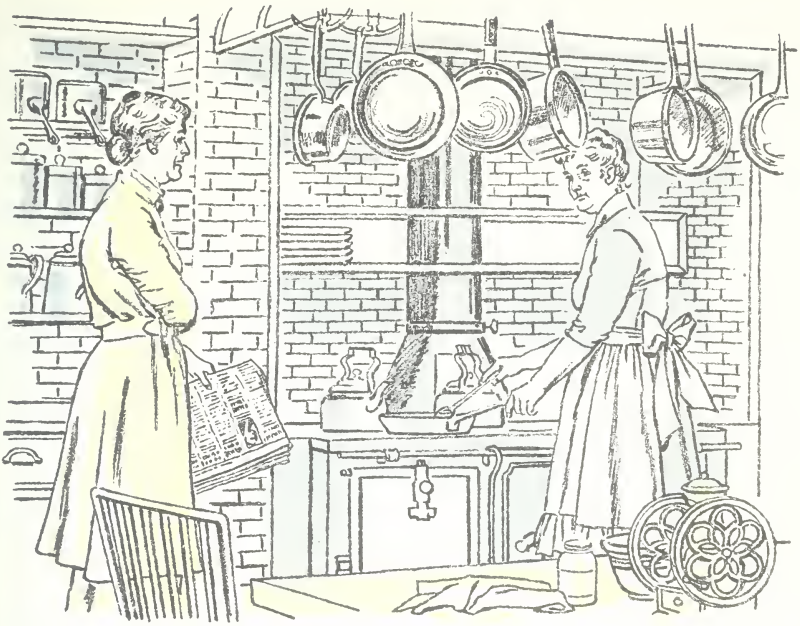
> I feel that Harold A. Segur is Mrs. Greer's son and is the person of whom she spoke, but I am not definitely certain of this fact nor do I have any documentary evidence to prove it. I thoroughly believe, from the investigations I have made, that Mrs. Greer had no living relatives other than the son of whom she spoke to me and to other people.

Letting the document drop on the table, Friedman lifted his eyes and voice. "Your Honor, while we cannot rest on the report made by Mr. Armbruster when he filed the will, we can and will prove that Harold Segur is Mrs. Greer's son. And now, if your Honor please, I will call our first witness, Mrs. Annie Jackson, who was Mrs. Greer's maid for twenty-five years."

A timid smile and a timid step were her response to the call of her name. Annie Jackson's place was in the home, and the good servant listened rather than talked. Although she had been subjected to many interviews by different lawyers, each trying to get a different meaning out of the same facts, she was still not used to their ways.

Friedman's questioning was as homely as he could make it as he gently led her through preliminary testimony which established that during her years with Mrs. Greer she had been on intimate terms with her mistress.

"Did Mrs. Greer ever tell you about her son?"



"She did," the witness acknowledged. "After I was with her about ten years she began to tell me about her son."

"Tell us what she said to you about her son at that time?"

"She said that she had something to tell me, providing I didn't mention it for it to harm her. Then she told me this child had been born to her in her younger age and that the child had been left in a boardinghouse in Boston, where it was born, and she had never returned to see it. Then she went on with the story — how she had wanted to see the child, but she had no money. She wanted to do something for the child, but after she married Mr. Greer she could not afford to have him find out, and that was the burden she had been carrying all the years."

"Did she ever tell you who the father of the child was?"

"She said that Dr. Segur was the father of the boy."

"Did she ever tell you that the boy had been adopted?"

"Yes. In 1939, when this doctor died and she saw the death notice in the paper, she came into the kitchen and read it to me

while I was getting the dinner. When she got to the part about his leaving an adopted son, she said, 'That's my boy.' "

"You are talking now about the death notice of Dr. Willard Segur?"

"Yes. And she said, 'I thought that he would adopt it and I am happy that he did.' "

"After she had first spoken to you about her son, how often did Mrs. Greer speak to you about her son?"

"Well, almost every day she would say something."

Satisfied with this simple, straightforward presentation of his first witness, Friedman sat down. But before him on the table lay a photograph. He looked searchingly into the enigmatic beauty of that face, lost for the moment in contemplation. Then he rose again, saying, "One thing more, your Honor. May I ask Mrs. Jackson if she can identify the lady in this photograph?"

The witness took the photograph and replied, "Yes. That is Mrs. Greer in her wedding dress."

Francis D. Wells, representing the executor of the estate, admired the brevity and simplicity of Friedman's presentation. It was well calculated to make the case seem A, B, C. It followed a logical sequence — Mrs. Greer had a son, the son was adopted by Dr. Segur, Harold Segur was Dr. Segur's adopted son, therefore Harold Segur was Mrs. Greer's son. His job was to destroy the simplicity and wreck the conclusion. With the premise that Mrs. Greer had a son, he would not quarrel. Also, assuredly, Harold Segur was the adopted son of Dr. Segur, and Mrs. Greer may well have thought that the adopted son was her son. But Wells would attack this supposition, and he now lost no time in going to the attack.

Referring to the incident in 1939 when Mrs. Greer had read Dr. Segur's death notice with its mention of his adopted son, Wells said, "On your direct examination by Mr. Friedman, I believe you said that Mrs. Greer told you, 'That's my boy.' Is that right?"

"Yes; yes."

"But when I examined you sometime ago, on a pretrial examination, you testified that Mrs. Greer had said, 'That *must be* my boy.' Isn't that so, Annie?"

"Yes."

"Yes," Wells reiterated. "And is that the correct statement that Mrs. Greer made to you at that time?" the lawyer asked.

"I am trying to collect my thoughts. That wasn't yesterday," she said.

The best way it could be left, then, Wells decided, was by taking a lawyer's refuge in a witness's "best recollection." So he asked, "Is that the best recollection you have, Annie?"

"That is the best I have, yes," the woman conceded.

Pursuing his point — that Mrs. Greer did not identify her son with Harold Segur other than by supposing that Dr. Segur's adopted son was her own — Wells continued, "Did she ever furnish any name to you as the name of this child?"

"She always called him either 'Little Bill' or 'The Boy.' "

"Now, Annie," the lawyer continued, "did Mrs. Greer ever tell you who was present at the time the child was born in the Boston boardinghouse?"

"Dr. Segur was present and the woman that owned the boarding-house."

Wells paused. He was prepared to argue on the basis of her testimony that all Mrs. Greer had said about the adoption was merely a deduction or rationalization from what she had read in the paper in 1939. It was notable to his mind that, although Mrs. Greer had told the witness of the birth and abandonment of the child long before, she had said nothing about an adoption until she read of the doctor's death and of his leaving an adopted child.

One other thing now came to his mind, a story this faithful servant had told him of another conversation with Mrs. Greer shortly before she died. He led the witness to tell of the circumstances of the exchange, and then asked, "Did she mention anything about a trip that she was going to take?"

"She said in September she hoped that she would be well enough to go to Boston to look, she said, 'for my boy.' "

"Did she say what she would do when she found him?"

"Well, she told me she wanted to see him and let him see her; and she wanted to do something for him, give him some money."

Wells sat down. The point, to him, was that Mrs. Greer to the

end was thinking of her son as being in Boston, not Worcester, Harold Segur's home.

This line of questioning seemed promising to the third lawyer involved, Joseph Cox. With directness he asked the witness, "Did Mrs. Greer ever tell you where her boy lived?"

"Well, she didn't know where he lived."

"Subsequent to 1939, did Mrs. Greer ever tell you that she was trying to communicate with her boy?"

"No. I knew she was not, for the reason that she had the fear of Mr. Greer knowing, and she didn't try."

"After Mr. Greer's death, what did Mrs. Greer tell you about the boy?"

"She wanted to see him. She wanted to go and look for him, and that was the one thought she had."

But she evidently didn't know where to find him, Cox thought, and that belied her professed belief that he was the adopted son of Dr. Segur.

Now, perhaps the witness could contribute something on the matter of age. Questions of age were going to haunt this case, Cox knew — Mrs. Greer's age, her son's age, even the doctor's age when the child was born.

On her application for a marriage license, made out in November 1908, Mabel Seymour had stated that she was twenty-seven and had been born in 1881 in Manchester, England, the daughter of a James Seymour and Charlotte Barnes. Diligent inquiry had been made in Manchester to verify this information but no record of her birth had been uncovered.

"After Mr. Greer's death did Mrs. Greer indicate to you how old her boy was or would be at that time?" Cox asked.

The answer indicated something about Mrs. Greer, but nothing about age: "Mrs. Greer never talked much of age — never. Not her boy's age, nor her own age."

All information vital to the search for the son seemed to be buried in a past before the time that anyone living knew or could place Mrs. Greer. Here before the court now was her oldest retainer, servant, companion and confidante. What did she know of Mrs. Greer prior to her becoming Mrs. Greer?

"Did Mrs. Greer tell you what she was doing in Boston at the time of the birth of this child?" Cox inquired.

"No."

"Did she say anything about her life before she met Mr. Greer?"

"No."

Cox was finished. Friedman was prompted by the cross-examination to put only one further question before releasing the witness — the crucial question of age. He knew that, according to the age stated in her application for a marriage license, Mrs. Greer would have been sixty-five at the time of her death, and that the opposition was going to argue that she had been only seven years old in 1888, the year Harold Segur was born. But he did not accept that record and was going to challenge it at every opportunity, and he could now get something from Mrs. Jackson as to her observations of Mrs. Greer's apparent age.

"Mrs. Jackson," he said, "what in your opinion was the age of Mrs. Greer at the time of her death?"

"Well," the witness replied, "I would say that in my opinion she would be somewhere between seventy-three and seventy-four."

The lawyers were finished with the first witness. The judge made a gesture of dismissal and Annie Jackson stepped down.

Friedman's next witnesses were Dr. and Mrs. William J. Tierney. Dr. Tierney asserted his reluctance to testify on a topic he considered confidential as between physician and patient, but the judge was cuttingly short with him. "There is no such rule of law, Doctor. There may be some aspects of a doctor's relation with his patient which are confidential, but not his total contacts with her. Answer the questions."

The doctor sat back and testified. Mrs. Greer, he said, was known as Mabel Seymour when he first met her. He continued a professional relationship with her after her marriage, and his wife and Mrs. Greer became very friendly and visited back and forth. A year or two after her marriage, Mrs. Greer told him that she had had a child and passed its care over to somebody else and had not seen the child since. She had described the father as a prominent doctor in Boston, but she had not named him.

Mrs. Tierney, who followed her husband on the stand, was much less reluctant to testify. She felt that the confidences she had received from her old friend over the years might shed some light on the mystery. Friedman asked, "Mrs. Tierney, did Mrs. Greer ever tell you that she had given birth to a son?"

"Yes." The lady settled in. "Mrs. Greer called me up about fifteen years ago, and I knew she had been crying. I asked her what was wrong. She said, 'I want to tell you something and if I pick you up in the car, will you come over to the park?' So Frank — he was her chauffeur — brought us over to the park."

"What did Mrs. Greer tell you at that time?"

"Mrs. Greer said, 'I have a surprise for you. I am terribly mixed up.' Then she said, 'I had a son born before I married Mr. Greer,' and I asked, 'Were you married before?' She said, 'No,' and she started right on the story. She said, 'After the baby was born I went down and bought a christening robe. I insisted upon having the child baptized. I saw to that.' Then she said the doctor wanted to keep the baby, but she didn't want to give it up, so she walked around Boston crying. She didn't have any money. Then she finally saw some church open, and she sat down in there to think things over and she found there was no way she could keep the child, so she gave it up to some woman there in Boston."

When Wells's turn came, he asked, "Did Mrs. Greer ever mention anything about an adoption of the child?"

"No."

"Did Mrs. Greer ever tell you that she had told the story to her chauffeur, Frank?"

"Yes. About four years ago. Mrs. Greer came in to New York to see me, from the Piping Rock Club on Long Island, where she and Mr. Greer were staying. She was quite worked up. It seems that Mr. Greer was in the city that day and she was going for a ride. She got in the car and Frank handed her a card. He said, 'A gentleman gave me this card to give you.' When Mrs. Greer saw the name on it she almost fainted. She said, 'Frank, take me back to the club. We will pack up and leave right away.' And they did, and when they were coming home Mrs. Greer almost collapsed. She said, 'Frank, stop — I can't go any further.' Then Frank said,

'What's the matter with you?' and she told Frank about her son."

"Did she tell you what name appeared on the card?"

"No, she didn't."

"Continue, please."

"So then she — of course, she was in a terrible way — she was crying and carrying on. I told her that she would have to stop thinking about it and pick herself up because she had to go home and face Mr. Greer. So she took my advice and went home, and then she telephoned me that night. She said, 'I was fine all through dinner.' "

THE ONLY fresh line of testimony introduced by Mrs. Tierney was the Piping Rock Club incident. The following witness, however, had a great deal of new information to place before the court. Witnesses can come in strange ways. Jennie Sheppard came by letter. Out of the blue, an answer to prayer.

Lester Friedman was fully conscious of the weakness in his case. The most important link in his chain of proof was Dr. Segur's adoption of Mabel Seymour's child. And all that Friedman had to go on were statements made by Mrs. Greer long after the event, when it was questionable whether she spoke from actual knowledge or mere supposition from what she read in Dr. Segur's obituary.

If there were someone somewhere who had known Mrs. Greer at the time when her child had been adopted by Dr. Segur, that person would be elderly by now, probably an old lady who had lived around Boston in the 1880's or 90's. But one couldn't just wander around Boston asking every old lady if she had known a person called Mabel Seymour fifty years ago.

Then one morning, when Friedman sat down at his desk, there was an unusual letter awaiting him. It was signed "Jennie Sheppard," and the address was in New York City.

The next day Jennie Sheppard sat across the desk from him, a woman well into her seventies, with strong features and snapping dark-brown eyes under straggling gray-white hair. The shabbiness of dress did not indicate poverty so much as lack of care about her appearance. She was not interested in money; she made that clear

at the outset. She wanted nothing except to tell what she knew. That she told volubly.

Friedman listened, questioned. Beyond the fact that the woman had lived in Worcester a half century before, there was no way to check her story. Jennie Sheppard would have to be offered as a witness on her own. He hoped that she would carry conviction.

"Mrs. Sheppard," Friedman began, "do you know the lady in this photograph?"

Glancing at the photograph of Mrs. Greer in her wedding dress, the witness snapped out, "Mabel Seymour."

"When did you first meet Mabel Seymour?"

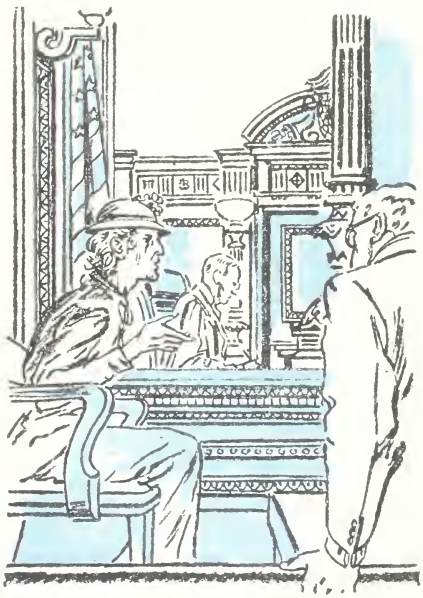
"My husband was coming in by train from Boston — "

Already Friedman was beginning to fear garrulousness. He cut in, "When was that? How long ago?"

"It was Christmas Eve."

"How long ago?"

"Well, about fifty-two years ago."



"Where were you living at that time?"

"One ninety-two Chandler Street, Worcester, Massachusetts. It was Christmas Eve and my husband brought her. He said she was poor and she was looking for a place to live. He asked if I could make room for her, so I says, 'Bring her in.' "

The Sheppard family at that time, she said, consisted of her husband, herself and their two-year-old son, Mannie. Mabel Seymour stayed with them until March.

"During the time that she was with you at your home,

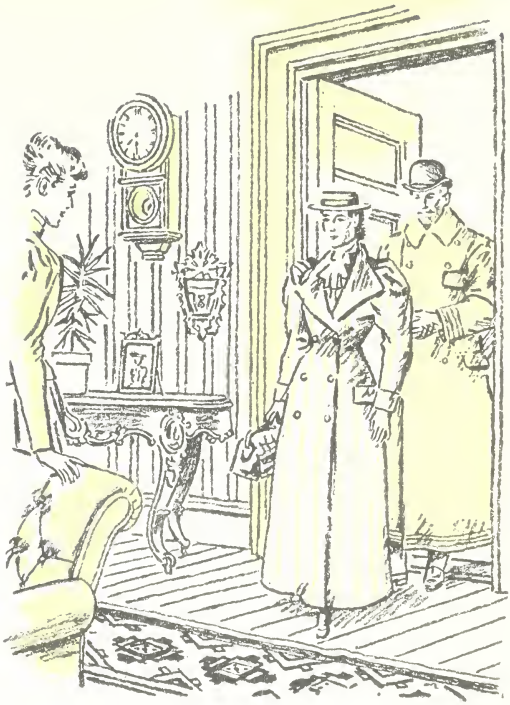
did Mabel Seymour do any work?" Friedman asked.

"Yes. She helped me with the housework. She was an adorable, well-behaved girl."

"Did Mabel Seymour ever tell you anything of her personal life?"

"Yes. She told me she had been going with a young man by the name of Willard Segur who was studying medicine in Boston. He had promised to marry her, and she had become the mother of his little boy."

"Did she tell you what had become of the boy?"



"She said that she put him in a safe place, something like a boardinghouse, and that Willard Segur had an understanding with her; that in time he would take the boy out, like adopt him, and raise him in his home."

All eyes were riveted on the witness.

"Did she tell you how old the boy was?"

"No. She told me that the boy was older than my boy."

"Do you remember when your boy Mannie was born?"

"Well, November will be fifty-five years."

"That means he was born in 1892. Is that correct?"

"Yes."

"Then when Mabel Seymour was in your home in Worcester, when Mannie was a little over two years old, that was in 1894?"

"Yes."

"Do you know how old Mabel Seymour was at that time?"

"Well, she looked to me like twenty-four or twenty-five. I didn't question her, because I thought she may not like it."

"Now, you say that Mabel Seymour left your home in the early part of March of 1895. Did she tell you where she was going?"

"Yes. She said she was going to New York City to try and get a position, like at a hotel, a chambermaid."

"Did you see Mabel Seymour again after that?" The question was a signal of something even more portentous to come.

Only once, the old lady replied, fifteen years later. It was in Worcester when Mannie was seventeen years old. She placed the time by his having chicken pox at the time. It was not at the same house which Mabel Seymour had visited before. She came unannounced, saying that she had located Mrs. Sheppard through a friend in New York.

"Did you ask her about her life?" Friedman inquired.

"Yes. I asked her how she was getting along. She told me she was very happy. She married a rich man and she was very happy, but she felt depressed for the boy. 'Mabel,' I says, 'do you ever see your little son?' She said, 'No.' She says Willard had made his promise good. He took him in his home and he is raising him. He adopted him right out."

There it was — a contemporary confirmation of the adoption, indubitably pointing to Harold Segur as the son of Mrs. Greer. Friedman allowed it full effect before putting his next and last questions. "How long did she visit with you that second time?"

"She just came for the day. She took me to a department store, and she bought me a dress. Then she left, but before she bid me good-by, she gave me ten ten-dollar gold pieces — one hundred dollars altogether. She says, 'You were good to me. You gave me shelter. You threw your home open to me. Go home now, make a good supper.' "

"After Mabel Seymour left you that second time, you never saw her again?"

"No. I never seen her again."

Quietly Friedman retired to his seat, leaving a full courtroom under the spell of the old woman's homely account of her last meeting with Mabel Seymour.

"MAY WE have a short recess before cross-examination, your Honor?" Wells asked. "I should like to confer with Mr. Cox."

The request was granted and the two lawyers went into a huddle in the corridor.

"Is she telling the truth or is that story made out of whole cloth?"

"There isn't a word of truth in it, in my opinion," Wells answered. "She is a fanciful old woman and dreamed up that tale."

"But can you prove it?" Cox asked.

"There's only one way," replied Wells. "Her story is pat enough in outline, but can she fill in the details? You can't just make them up as you go along. We must not spare her. Give her a lot of rope, you know. That is the way."

Cox agreed, and the lawyers returned to their task.

"How MANY years ago was that, Mrs. Sheppard, that you first met Miss Seymour?" Wells began.

"Fifty-two years ago."

"What makes you so certain in your mind it was fifty-two years ago?"

"On account of my little boy's age."

"When was he born?"

"He was born November third."

"What year?"

"I never kept any remembrance of any years," the witness asserted with disdain.

"You can't remember the year?"

"No, I never kept it."

"You can remember how many years ago it was that you met Mrs. Greer but you can't remember the date when your son was born?"

"Oh, yes — the third of November."

"I am talking about the year, Mrs. Sheppard."

"I never — I didn't have the patience to write it down, but my boy knows in Worcester." For her that settled it.

Wells shifted. "Where were you born?" he asked.

"New York City."

"Give me the year, the date and the month."

"I think I was born in 1870."

"Do you recall what year you were married?"

"Yes. The first of April."

Wells raised his voice. "What year?"

"My mother had died and a week after that I got married," the witness rejoined. "She's dead fifty-seven years now."

"I am asking you to tell me what year." Wells spoke with accentuated distinctness.

"I told you," the old lady replied. "I never marked it down, but I do know I was married that long. All I know, it was April Fool that Sunday."

Wells retreated strategically to other ground. "How long have you known about this case?" he inquired.

"Oh, I have been reading the papers right along, and when I seen the names Seymour and Segur, it all came back to me. So I sat down and I wrote a letter to Mr. Friedman."

"How did you get his name?"

"In the paper. I didn't know him and he didn't know me. I wrote him a very nice long interesting letter and then, when he got it, he thought it over."

"How do you know he thought it over?"

"He wanted to know if I am telling the truth."

Friedman, listening tensely, relaxed for a second at this spontaneous demonstration of good faith.

Wells was feeling his way. He had to admit that he had not yet found a soft spot in the testimony. The old woman had stood her ground, altogether composed.

"On that Christmas Eve fifty-two years ago, Mrs. Sheppard, weren't you a little surprised to see a woman walking in with your husband?" Wells himself looked surprised.

"Why was I surprised? I trusted him," she shot back.

"Had you or your husband known this woman before she arrived there that night?"

"Never in his life. They got in conversation, you know, talking on the train. He pitied her because she looked pitiful."

What explanation had Mabel Seymour given for landing in

Worcester? What had she been doing in Boston? What of her family? the lawyer asked. Nothing had been said on those subjects, the witness replied, except that Mabel had been doing some kind of work for which she got paid ten cents an hour.

"When she spoke to you, did you observe anything with regard to her accent?"

"There was a little accent there. It could be like down East, you know, or like a little English accent, you know. Not much though."

"How much did this woman pay you for her room?"

"I wouldn't take a penny from her. I threw my home open to her. I didn't want no money. She said she would never forget me."

The lawyer eyed his quarry. "Did you ever throw your home open to anybody else before or after that incident?" he asked. "Just take them off the street?"

"Just that poor girl. She was a nice, well-behaved girl."

"You didn't know it at the time?" he suggested.

"When she came to my home she was adorable. I liked her," the witness said firmly.

Wells looked at Cox. With unspoken understanding the one sat down and the other stood up. The witness remained, ready for another encounter.

Cox started tentatively, "When did you first read about this case in the newspapers?"

"I think it was January sometime. I never keep a memory of anything. I started reading and then I got very interested."

"Are you testifying that you don't have any memory of anything?" Cox asked challengingly.

Emphatically the woman replied, "Oh, I got memories."

"You said this girl seemed to be about twenty-four or twenty-five years of age?"

"I am not a good judge, but she looked that way to me."

"How old were you then?"

"I must have been her age, too."

"How old were you?" he repeated impatiently.

"Well, I got married at — "

"How old were you? Please!" His tone indicated exasperation.

"I guess about the same, because I am seventy-seven now."

"You don't know, do you?" the lawyer asked, as if the same observation might be made of all her statements.

"I told you I never remember any years or nothing like that," was the limited but final admission.

"She went away in March, you say. Where did she go?"

"To New York. I got a card she arrived safe."

"Have you got the card?"

"Oh, my God! If I had everything . . ." the woman ejaculated.

Cox did not allow the exclamation to deter him. "Did she ever write anything else, this girl that you befriended?"

"Nothing."

Cox eyed the old woman sternly and detected the first signs of fatigue. He decided to bear down. "Weren't you surprised after fifteen years to see this woman walk in?" he asked tauntingly.

"I was thunderstruck when I seen her."

"And it was then you learned she was married?"

"She told me she married a very rich man, that she was happily married."

"Did this girl tell you when she was married?"

"Yes — 1908."

"You remember that?"

"Yes."

"What year were you married?"

"I don't remember that, because my marriage — "

The explanation got no further before the lawyer broke in, "You don't remember when you were married, do you?"

"My marriage paper got lost."

"But you remember when this girl got married?"

"Well, she told it to me," she explained.

"That is the only year that you remember?"

"She told me — "

Cox broke in again, "But anything that happened to you, your family, the only year you remember — "

"I ain't got the patience to keep all those things on my mind. I am old," she complained.

Ignoring the plea, the lawyer pressed on, "The only thing you remember is the year Mabel Seymour was married?"

"She was good to me. I will always love her."
"And you remember the year that she was married?"
"That is what she told me."
There was nothing more for either to say.

Raymond Armbruster did not like court proceedings. He preferred an office practice, getting the facts in ordinary ways, and dealing with people in a nonadversary relationship. He was a sociable person — tall, tanned, good-looking and easy of manner. His friends were his clients, and his clients were his friends. Among both clients and friends for fifteen years had been Mr. and Mrs. Louis Morris Greer.

Friedman had called Armbruster as the claimant's witness, but he eyed the other attorney coldly as he questioned him about the conferences he had with Mrs. Greer in preparation of the will. Friedman was particularly interested in the conference on June 3, 1946, for it was then, according to Armbruster's affidavit at the time the will was filed — Friedman intended to revert to that affidavit again and again — that Mrs. Greer had told Armbruster of her illegitimate son.

Consulting notes as he testified, Armbruster contributed the following new facts: Mrs. Greer, in her conversation with him, said that she was sixteen at the time she had gone to Boston; that she was studying music; that the baby was born in a private nursing home; that the doctors who delivered the child were Dr. Harvey Cushing and Dr. Derby, both of Boston; that the woman in charge of the home was Irish; and that the child, after adoption by the father, had been educated at Fieldstone Preparatory School and Dartmouth College.

Then Armbruster, at Friedman's request, identified the notes he had been using for future reference, and turned them over to the claimant's lawyer for perusal.

Now it was Wells's turn. In cross-examination he drew from Armbruster the statement that Mrs. Greer did not tell him how she had learned of the adoption of her child by Dr. Segur other than by a reference to the 1939 obituary. Armbruster also testified for Wells that Frank Reitman, the Greers' former chauffeur, had

been discussed in this June third conversation, and Mrs. Greer had related to him the Piping Rock incident already referred to by Mrs. Tierney.

"In this conversation did Mrs. Greer identify the child by name?" Wells asked.

"She referred to the child as Willard Segur, Jr."

Wells then turned to a matter not dealt with by Friedman on direct examination — Armbruster's conversations with Harold Segur following Mrs. Greer's death.

Armbruster selected another set of notes from his portfolio and, placing them before him, told of two telephone conversations with Segur on August 14, 1946, and a visit to Segur's home in Worcester on August 15, 1946.

Over the telephone, according to Armbruster's testimony, Segur told him that his father, now dead, was Dr. Willard Segur; that his mother was Mary Theresa O'Donnell, who had later married Dr. Segur; that he was born in Boston, had been graduated from Dean Academy, and had attended Dartmouth College for one year. Segur also stated that he had never heard of or been at the Piping Rock Club in Locust Valley, New York.

When Armbruster visited Segur at his home in Worcester the following day, Segur told him, according to Armbruster's testimony, that he was born in the Lying-In Hospital in Boston on February 26, 1887. He had been adopted in 1901 on the petition of Dr. Willard B. Segur and Mary T. Segur. At that time his name was changed from Harold A. Baker to Harold A. Segur.

"I then inquired of Mr. Segur where the name 'Harold A. Baker' came from," Armbruster testified.

"What did he say to that?" Wells asked.

"Mr. Segur stated that he did not know, but a woman in Enfield, Massachusetts, where he grew up, had come from his adopted mother's home town, Provincetown, Massachusetts, and she had once told him that he was not the child of Mary Theresa O'Donnell, but that Mary O'Donnell had taken him at his birth for the purpose of blackmailing one Harold A. Baker, who was a prominent citizen about Boston, and inducing him to marry her."

"What else was said at that point?"

"Mr. Segur then volunteered to show me a baby picture of himself, and produced one with the longhand writing on it 'Harry A. Baker, born February 26, 1888,' with the numeral '1' drawn through the numeral '2' making the date February 16, 1888. I then asked Mr. Segur why he had told me that he was born February 26, 1887, while here he had a photo of himself showing a date in 1888. Mr. Segur said, 'I might have been born that date, but I presume that was the date the photo was taken.' "

"What else was said?"

"Mr. Segur then told me that his mother had told him that the doctor who brought him into this world was Dr. C. A. Cliff."

"Was anything further said on the subject of parentage?"

"Only that when Mary T. Segur had died in 1927, he had been appointed administrator of her estate, and that he had hired at that time an attorney in Boston to make a search regarding his parentage; that the search had proved fruitless."

The nod now was from Wells to Cox. Cox, returning once again to Armbruster's conferences with Mrs. Greer in preparation of her will, was brief in his questioning.

"After your conversation with Mrs. Greer on June third, did you ever talk with her again about her son?"

"On August seventh, in the preparation of the will."

"What did she say on that occasion?"

"She stated that she did not wish this child to receive one red cent of her money."

On this abrupt but final note Cox sat down.

Friedman felt that the time had now come to go after the witness in his own way. Two things he wanted to accomplish. One was to discredit the chauffeur's story and the alleged appearance of Mrs. Greer's son. Now, with some expected coöperation from Armbruster, he undertook to lay the ghost of Piping Rock.

"Mr. Armbruster," he began, "do you recall my office associate, Miss Lilian Weinberg, calling to see you?"

"I do."

"Do you recall telling Miss Weinberg at that time that you felt that Frank Reitman, the chauffeur, was blackmailing Mrs. Greer?"

"I don't recall my exact words. I may have said I felt that way."

The witness was obviously being cautious, but the impression given was clear enough to serve Friedman's purpose. He was prepared to argue that Mrs. Greer had been sufficiently free in telling people about her illegitimate son that Reitman had gotten wind of it and made up the Piping Rock story to scare her.

Friedman could now turn to his really important objective — to establish if he possibly could, because it was the mainspring of his case, that Mrs. Greer had learned of the adoption of her child by Dr. Segur prior to reading of his death in the newspaper. She had consistently stated that she had not heard from the child or its father since leaving the child with the woman who operated the boardinghouse or nursing home. Then how could she have learned of the adoption? That was a question which the judge would surely ask.

Friedman felt that he had found the answer to this all-important question, the key to the riddle, in Armbruster's notes which he had just been studying, and in the affidavit filed with Mrs. Greer's will.

"Mr. Armbruster, do you recall testifying for Mr. Wells this morning that Mrs. Greer did not tell you how she learned of the adoption of her son?"

"I do."

"Permit me then," Friedman said acidly, "to refer you to your notes of your June third conversation with Mrs. Greer: 'She kept in touch with the lady in charge of the nursing home and learned that the child was adopted by its father, Willard Segur.' Did you write that?"

"Yes."

"And you state that Mrs. Greer did not tell you from whom she learned of the adoption of her son?"

"I do."

Friedman appeared incredulous. "Do you understand what I am asking you, sir?"

The witness was definite. "I do, and I am positive that she never told me that."

The judge had followed this exchange intently, fully sensitive to its import, and felt impelled to make inquiry.

"Did Mrs. Greer say something which led you to make that note?"

"No, she did not, sir," the witness replied. "That is the way I wrote it down hurriedly, after I returned to my office."

"Did you write something in your memorandum respecting a matter which Mrs. Greer did not discuss with you?"

"No, I did not. She merely mentioned to me that she kept in touch with the lady in charge of the nursing home. Then later she told me she learned that the child had been adopted by its father and had been named Willard Segur, Jr."

"Is this person whom your note describes as the lady in charge of the nursing home the same person whom you have referred to as the 'Irish lady'?"

"Yes, sir."

Friedman was pleased with his excursion into Armbruster's notes, the more so as the judge had taken a hand in the questioning and pressed the witness. But he was not finished; there was another trump to play. He returned to his favorite card, the Armbruster affidavit submitted to the court when the will was filed.

"Now, Mr. Armbruster," he said, "I will read to you from your affidavit sworn to September 5, 1946, wherein you state: 'Mrs. Greer had communicated with the person who operated the home at Boston and learned that the child later was adopted by his father, Willard B. Segur. Later she read of the death of Dr. Segur in the New York newspaper.' Is that statement correct?"

"It is not correct that she learned from the lady in charge of the nursing home," Armbruster replied precisely.

"In other words," Friedman said triumphantly, "the affidavit is not correct?"

"The affidavit is correct," came the measured reply. "I meant that she kept in touch with the lady in charge of the nursing home; that later she learned of the adoption, but not from the lady in the nursing home."

"I see," Friedman said dryly. "That is *your* interpretation of the statement made in your affidavit?"

"That is the way I intended it to be interpreted," the witness said calmly.

FRIEDMAN had arranged the presentation of his evidence so that practically all his proof would be in before he called Harold Segur to the stand. He had only one more witness to present now before the appearance of the claimant.

Erika Segnitz's testimony was brief. A statuesque blonde with a decided German accent, she told the court she had known Mrs. Greer since 1930 and they had been close friends. One day in 1936, she said, Mrs. Greer had told her of her illegitimate son who had been adopted by the father, Willard Segur. She placed the date of this conversation with reference to a conference that same day with her attorney about her application for citizenship, and also with reference to her marriage, which had taken place in 1936 only shortly before. She was definitely sure, she said, that Mrs. Greer, in subsequent conversations, had referred to the child as "my son Harry." And in response to a question by Friedman, Erika Segnitz stated that Mrs. Greer appeared to be sixty years old in 1930, which would have made it altogether possible for her to have had a child in 1887 or 1888.

FRIEDMAN had now shored up the foundation of his case — Mrs. Greer's identification, prior to 1939, of her child as the adopted son of Dr. Segur.

Friedman knew that there was little Segur could add in support of his position except his honest countenance and manner, and the sympathy engendered by the way he had been drawn into the proceedings. For he had been told that if he would sign a waiver of any claim there would be no publicity. The family had little of worldly goods, but they had built in quiet respectability a good home and a good name. In the faces of his four sons and in the thoughts of his wife the answer was clear. He signed.

Then it all broke in blaring headlines, violating all that his love and sacrifice had sought to protect.

So Segur was here with full justification and no little determination. As he had said to a reporter:

> Now that all this has become public, I have every intention of fighting for and obtaining for myself what is justly and legally due.

Besides, I have a family of my own to think about. Up to now it was the thought of my wife and four grown boys that prevented me from coming out into the open and proclaiming myself the illegitimate son of Mrs. Greer. Now that the whole world knows it, I will have no hesitation in claiming the inheritance that is due me.

The man who took the witness stand had a fine face, frank eyes that looked through silver-rimmed spectacles, gray hair and a well-modulated voice. He spoke softly and answered all questions simply and to the point.

As he sat in the witness chair he appeared to be about sixty years of age.

"Mr. Segur, what is your first recollection of your early childhood?" Friedman asked.

"My earliest recollection," Segur stated, "is living with my foster mother, Mary Theresa O'Donnell, in Boston, in a sort of boarding-house where a lot of women lived. We all ate at the same table."

"Do you have any other recollection of your early childhood?"

"Yes. I can remember being taken by my foster mother to visit Dr. Segur in a hospital. My next recollection is moving to Enfield, Massachusetts, when my foster mother married Dr. Segur in 1895."

The lawyer went directly to the question of age. "When were you born, Mr. Segur?"

"February 16, 1888," was the precise reply.

Friedman took from an envelope which he held in his hand a photograph, an ivory-tone print on pasteboard, the picture of a young child in a dress and high button shoes seated snugly on a fur rug. Segur identified it as a baby picture of himself. There was written at the bottom of the picture, in a handwriting which he could not identify, the words "Harry A. Baker, born Feb. 26th, 1888" with a numeral "1" drawn through the "2" in 26th, making it "Feb. 16th, 1888."

The lawyer then handed the witness a paper, the petition of Willard B. Segur and Mary T. Segur, his wife, for the adoption of Harold Alfred Baker, described as a foundling of unknown parentage, born at the Boston Lying-In Hospital on February 16, 1887.

The petition recited that the child had been taken at birth by Mary T. Segur and given her then married name, Baker, that he had since remained under her care and since her marriage under the joint care of Dr. and Mrs. Segur. The petition was dated July 18, 1901, and was signed by Willard B. Segur and Mary T. Segur, and at the bottom, after the printed legend — "I, the child above named, being over the age of fourteen years, hereby consent to the adoption" — was signed in a schoolboy's hand, "Harold Alfred Baker."

"Mr. Segur," Friedman inquired, "is that your signature at the bottom of that paper?"

"Yes, sir, it is."

"Was that the first time you heard the name 'Baker' mentioned with respect to yourself?"

"It was, yes, sir."

"How old were you at that time?"

"Thirteen."

The judge asked for the paper. It was not difficult to read his thoughts. According to the adoption paper, Harold Segur was fourteen at the time of his adoption in 1901. Obviously Segur was now trying to get away from the birth date given in the adoption paper. And in this he was supported by the baby picture with its 1888 birth date. If Segur could now throw doubt on the veracity of the statement of his birth date in the adoption paper, he could equally challenge the correctness of the stated place of birth, the Boston Lying-In Hospital. And that was important, for Mrs. Greer had consistently stated that her child was born in a boardinghouse or nursing home, not in a hospital.

The judge felt that the documents deepened rather than lifted the mystery, for there were now four dates of birth to choose from: February 16, 1887, in the adoption paper; February 26, 1888, in the baby picture, corrected to February 16 (and what weight should be attached to this evidence that someone, presumably intent on accuracy, addressed himself to correcting the day but not the year?); and February 26, 1887, according to Armbruster's testimony of what Segur had told him.

But Friedman now went on to ask his client to tell of his living in Dr. Segur's household and of his attendance at high school, at

boarding school, from which he graduated in 1908, and for a year at Dartmouth. At each stage the lawyer inquired how old Segur then was and received a categorical answer in accord with an 1888 birth date.

In 1907, the witness said, Dr. Segur and Mary T. Segur were divorced. Mrs. Segur left the house and he stayed with the doctor. He never saw his foster mother again. She passed away in 1927.

He told then of his employment, which since 1935 had been as Employment Manager of the Pullman Standard Car Manufacturing Company in Worcester. Friedman next had the witness relate the substance of his two telephone conversations with Armbruster, and then he asked him to describe his conversation with Armbruster at his home. Segur said that he had answered the lawyer's numerous questions about himself and his family until finally curiosity overcame him. "I asked him why he was asking all these questions without giving me any information. He told me that I had been very coöperative and that he would tell me the reason.

"He read a paper he took from his portfolio to the effect that Mrs. Greer about two months prior to her death had confided to him that when she was about sixteen years of age she had given birth to a boy in Boston and the father of that boy was Willard B. Segur, a premedic student, and that she had found out afterward that Dr. Segur had adopted me. He then took a copy of Mrs. Greer's will and read part of it to me, then handed me the paper and told me I might read it if I wished. I glanced through the paper. I didn't read it thoroughly. He stated to me that Mrs. Greer had not mentioned me in her will because she felt that when Dr. Segur died he was very prosperous and had amply taken care of me.

"He then told me that I, of course, had a right to contest the will, as an heir, but that it would involve tremendous expense, might take many years of court proceedings, and in the end I might not get anything. He said that it would cause a lot of notoriety to myself and to my family, but that if I wished to sign a waiver releasing any claim to the estate, he would guarantee me there would be absolutely no publicity. On the strength of Mr.

Armbruster's statement that there would be no publicity, I signed a waiver, although I told him at the time that I could certainly use the money, but I would do everything in the world to protect my family. Mr. Armbruster then produced two copies of waivers, and I signed my name to both copies.

"Mr. Armbruster then looked at me and said, 'I am perfectly satisfied that you are the right man, but the only question is the age of Mrs. Greer.' I asked him what he meant by the age of Mrs. Greer. He said she was reported to be sixty-five at the time of her death and couldn't have been my mother if that was her age. I reminded him that according to what Mrs. Greer had told him, she was sixteen and Dr. Segur was a premedic student when I was born, and I pointed out that Dr. Segur finished his premedic courses in 1889, so if Mrs. Greer was sixteen at that time she was much older than sixty-five when she died."

The recital completed and the strain on memory eased, the witness seemed relieved. Friedman allowed him only a moment's respite, however, before resuming. The lawyer then drew from his client in rapid succession denials that he had told Armbruster that he was born in the Boston Lying-In Hospital or that he was born on February 26, 1887. He acknowledged having mentioned Dr. Cliff to Armbruster, but only as the doctor who had treated him as a child, not "brought him into the world." He had also spoken of a woman from Provincetown, but only as a person who had told him, when she learned of his adoption, that she was very pleased because she always knew that Mary Theresa O'Donnell was not his mother. He denied that she had told him that the woman had taken him at birth for the purpose of blackmailing one Harold A. Baker.

"Did Mr. Armbruster speak to you or did you tell him anything regarding your living with the doctor after the doctor and Mrs. Segur were divorced?" the lawyer asked.

"I told Mr. Armbruster," the witness replied, "that at the time the doctor told me they were going to separate he said I was old enough to know my mind, whether I wished to go with her or stay with him. I told him that by all means I was going to stay with him. He said he was awfully glad that I had made that decision. He

wanted me to always remember that blood was thicker than water."

After a pause to let the full force of this statement sink in, Friedman asked his last question.

"Just one thing more, Mr. Segur. Do you know the nationality of Mary Segur?"

"Well, her name was Mary Theresa O'Donnell, and I know when she died she was buried from the Catholic Church. I am pretty sure she was of Irish extraction."

WELLS, as he took up the cross-examination, felt no antagonism for Segur and had no desire to give him a raking examination. He liked and even admired the man whose claim he was opposing. Segur was no impostor faking a claim. But having undertaken to prove his claim, he had, Wells thought, been carried away with a growing enthusiasm and inclined to remember only the facts favorable to his case. As for the contradictions between Segur and Armbruster, Wells thought the judge would be more impressed with Armbruster's testimony from notes made at the time of the conversations than by Segur's denials, made considerably later and after reflection.

He first forced Segur to admit that no one had actually told him that the baby picture, discovered among the doctor's papers after his death, was one of himself. He then led him on to testify that he could not explain why Dr. Segur had entered his birth date as February 16, 1887, on the adoption paper, if, as he claimed, the actual date of his birth was February 16, 1888.

Now Wells was ready to spread his net. He turned the questioning to the subject of an investigation concerning Harold Segur's parentage by a Boston lawyer in 1927 after the death of Segur's foster mother. The lawyer, Henry Wise, had previously represented Mary Segur. Under questioning Segur acknowledged that Mr. Wise had volunteered to conduct such an examination but had later reported that he hadn't made any progress.

Wells closed in. "Didn't he tell you that he had found a record in the Lying-In Hospital, Boston, Massachusetts? Did he or didn't he?"

"Yes, he had found a record of a birth of a child, but he didn't say

it was a record of me. He said if I would send him five dollars he would have the clerk at the hospital send me a copy of it."

"And you did obtain a copy of that record, didn't you?"

"He sent me a copy, or a letter, rather."

"What is your best recollection, Mr. Segur, as to the contents of that letter?"

"It seems to me," the witness said falteringly, "it said there was — I don't remember whether it said a child or a son — born to an Addie Weston. I can't refresh my memory without seeing the record."

The witness could not recall if any other name was mentioned, nor could he remember the date of birth given in the letter.

"Would it refresh your recollection if I told you that the date referred to was February 26, 1887?" Wells asked.

"No, sir, it wouldn't," the witness replied.

It made no difference to Wells. He had interviewed the lawyer, Wise, and had seen a copy of the letter.

"But you do remember Addie Weston's name appeared in the letter, is that right?"

"Yes, there was an Addie Weston."

With that much of an admission Wells closed his cross-examination. Cox expressed his approval and satisfaction by sitting silent.

Friedman, for his part, wished to take the edge off the impression created by Wells's excursion into the Wise letter and to explain why his client had appeared so indefinite about it.

"After you received the letter from Mr. Wise, did you speak to Mr. Wise?"

"I spoke to him about the letter," Segur readily acknowledged.

"What did Mr. Wise tell you?"

"Mr. Wise told me that was the only record he could find, but that he didn't think it applied to me."

That was all. Harold Segur left the witness stand, the courthouse and New York. He left his fate in the hands of his vigorous lawyer and the inscrutable judge.

With the conclusion of the examination of Segur, Friedman rested his case. Wells and Cox made the usual motion to dismiss

the claim on the ground that Segur had not made a sufficient showing to warrant going on with the case.

The judge made short shrift of this. "No," he said, "the inquiry must go on."

The attorneys then requested an adjournment so that they might have time to extend their search for evidence. The request was reasonable for this was no ordinary case to which the lawyers could come fully prepared at the start. The threads of information going back sixty years were tenuous, hard to pick up and even harder to follow. None yet discovered had led home.

The judge granted the application for a six weeks' adjournment and said to all the attorneys, "There must be a decisive answer to this case. Even at this late date there must be some persons or some records that will make certain the truth. It is up to you gentlemen to find them. While you have divergent interests you are all in the case together and should coöperate to find the truth."

Court proceedings, although not a show, are apt to bear some resemblance to the theater. In fact, the two do have much in common. What meets the eye in the finished production, whether on stage or in the courtroom, is only a synthesis and refinement of the work, thought and effort that have gone on behind the scenes.

The Greer case took, in all, ten days to try, although the trial was spread over several months. But for every day that the lawyers spent in court presenting their finished case, many days were spent out of court garnering evidence.

Cox and Wells had the advantage of numbers over Friedman, and of much greater financial resources. Wells, as attorney for the estate, had its wealth to draw upon. Cox, as attorney for the Public Administrator, could count on the court's allowing him at least reimbursement of his expenses from the estate. Friedman, on the other hand, had neither help nor financial backing. He had only himself and hope. He was wise enough with that limitation to keep his case simple and to hammer away at the points in his favor, while Cox and Wells roamed farther afield in their search for evidence.

THE DAY was the eleventh of June; the year, 1947. The three attorneys, Wells, Cox and Friedman, were gathered in the office of

the director of the Boston Lying-In Hospital. They were poring over the individual case records of the patients who had given birth to children in the hospital during the months of February 1887 and 1888. There was an average of slightly over one birth a day, so more than sixty files were given close attention. But it was when case number 6230 was reached that eyes lighted up and pulses beat faster.

Case number 6230 was Addie Weston, who, according to the record, entered the hospital at 10:30 in the evening of February 25, 1887, and at 10:10 in the morning of the twenty-sixth gave birth to a boy. The admission sheet stated that the patient was twenty-two years of age and unmarried. The place for the name of the father was blank.

The daily clinical record of the patient showed that on March 8 the baby was adopted. And appended to the file was a single piece of paper, a simple document. It was dated March 8, 1887. The upper half recited, "I, Addie Weston, hereby consent to give my baby — a boy — to the within named for adoption." The lower half read, "I, Mrs. Mary O'Donnell, hereby agree to take the within named baby — a boy — for adoption." The document was witnessed by "L. A. Cliff."

There was considerable discussion among the lawyers about the several handwritings appearing in the document. This much was eventually agreed on between the attorneys — that none of the writing and neither of the signatures was in the handwriting of Mabel Seymour Greer, and likewise that none of the writing and neither of the signatures was in the handwriting of Mary T. Segur, the former Mary Theresa O'Donnell.

Friedman maintained a stiff upper lip throughout the examination of the documents and ensuing discussion. He refused to admit that the record of this birth referred to his client, as the signature of Mary O'Donnell could not be identified with the Mary Theresa O'Donnell who had adopted Harold Segur. The similarity of names was such a coincidence, however, and the identification of Harold Segur in his later adoption papers as a child born in the Boston Lying-In Hospital on February 16, 1887, was so close to the child born in the hospital on February 26, 1887, that Friedman·

must have had faint hope in any argument that they were not the same and that Harold Segur was not the child of "Addie Weston." But the argument that appeared most promising was that no one knew who Addie Weston was and no one could say that the name was not a blind for Mabel Seymour. The fact that the signature of "Addie Weston" was not in the handwriting of Mrs. Greer lost any significance since the signature of "Mary O'Donnell" was not in the handwriting of Mary Theresa O'Donnell.

One other witness was interviewed by the attorneys on that eventful day in Boston in June 1947. She was Dr. Frederica Cliff, the daughter of Dr. L. A. Cliff, who had died in 1929. She was able to say with certainty that the signature "L. A. Cliff" on the document of adoption, dated March 8, 1887, was the true signature of her father.

Wells and Cox were elated with the Boston excursion. They were confident that they had documented Harold Segur's birth. But in the days that followed the more they contemplated the showing of the hospital records the more apparent it became that they would never be able to button up their case unless and until they could identify Addie Weston and show that the name was not just one taken by Mabel Seymour to disguise her identity.

WHEN hearings in the "Matter of Mabel Seymour Greer" were resumed in the Surrogate's Court on June 25, 1947, it started as a prosaic morning, with Wells reading and marking into evidence the testimony and documents which had been taken at the Boston Lying-In Hospital. But as the documents, more eloquent than a dozen witnesses, loomed into meaning, it became an exciting morning. Here was the telltale trail. At the appropriate moment the judge asked, "What have you gentlemen learned about Addie Weston?"

"Nothing as yet, your Honor," Wells had to reply, "but we are diligently pursuing the matter."

Wells, however, was prepared to throw some further light on Mrs. Greer. During the weeks that the case had been in recess, letters and telephone calls had been received from numerous individuals purporting to have information about the past life of

Mrs. Greer. Most of these communications, upon checking, had been dismissed as worthless or unverifiable, but some were from honestly helpful and responsible people, such as Mrs. Elise Hamilton Weisbecker of Southampton, Long Island, who was now called as Wells's first witness.

The lady, though no longer young, had a lithe, compact figure and shapely legs. After preliminary questioning had brought out that she was a widow and had been born in 1888, Wells handed her the wedding photograph of Mrs. Greer and asked, "Have you ever seen the person pictured here?"

"Yes, I have," came the prompt reply.

"When did you first see that person?"

"In 1904."

"What name, as you recall, did that person have or go under at that time?"

"Polly Ernest."

There was an audible intake of breath on the part of all the spectators, in which Friedman shared.

"Where did you meet Polly Ernest in 1904?" Wells inquired.

"I met her in a play called *Humpty Dumpty,* played at the New Amsterdam Theater."

"What part did you have in that play?"

"I was a dancer."

"What relationship did Polly Ernest have to the play *Humpty Dumpty?"*

"She was a show girl."

During the five months the play remained in New York, Mrs. Weisbecker informed the court, she and her sister were with Polly Ernest most of the time. The friendship did not end then, for in time the sisters knew Polly Ernest both as Mabel Seymour and as Mabel Greer. The last time the witness saw Mrs. Greer was in 1938, but after that Mrs. Greer called Mrs. Weisbecker several times, the last time only a month before she died.

Against this background of familiarity with Mrs. Greer, Wells asked the witness the question which was his purpose in calling her: "What is your best opinion with regard to the age of Polly Ernest when you first met her in 1904?"

"Twenty-two or three. She was about my sister's age."

"And how old was your sister?"

"She was born in 1882."

Mrs. Greer had never mentioned to Mrs. Weisbecker the birth of a child or the name Segur. Beyond saying that she was born in Manchester, England, Mrs. Greer had never said anything about her background or history before 1904.

"That is all, thank you, Mrs. Weisbecker," Wells said politely, radiating his pleasure with her testimony.

Cox was satisfied and did not question the witness. Friedman was far from satisfied but saw no purpose to be served by cross-examination, so he desisted.

The testimony of Mrs. Weisbecker was completely buttressed by the evidence given by the next witness, Mrs. Viola Henderson. The attorneys had located her in Atlantic City, where she operated a diaper service. As Viola Cecil, she had played in *Humpty Dumpty* in 1904. She was a member of the chorus and one of the girls depicting "Black Coral of the Sea." She recalled that they wore black tights covered with silver sequins and very large black hats. She remembered Polly Ernest very well, and described her as plump, about five feet six inches in height, with very dark brown hair made up in pompadour style, creamy skin and a peach-bloom complexion. She spoke in a low and slow tone of voice and had a distinct English accent. "She had a little mannerism when she would be talking to you," the witness said. "She would sort of lean over and squint one eye and speak in a confidential way, as if she were telling you something of great importance."

Mrs. Henderson was positive that Polly was between twenty-two and twenty-four years of age at the time she first met her in 1904. It was impossible that Polly could have been thirty then because, as Mrs. Henderson explained knowingly, Ned Wayburn and the others in charge of the chorus would have noted a girl of thirty and she would have had no chance for that type of show. A girl of thirty was limited to burlesque.

Mrs. Weisbecker and Mrs. Henderson were the first to draw the curtain aside and reveal something of the life of Mrs. Greer prior to 1908. They were also the curtain raisers in the courtroom battle over Mrs. Greer's age. This question was bound to be a central issue in the case because, if Mrs. Greer had been born as late as 1880 she could not have been the mother of a child born in 1887 or 1888, however closely Harold Segur might match her description of the child.

Wells knew how fallible personal observations could be in estimating age. He lost no time, therefore, in introducing documents which were even more eloquent than Mrs. Greer's former companions on the stage.

The documents he now placed in evidence were the application for the marriage license, dated November 19, 1908; the marriage

certificate; the record of the United States Census of 1920 as it referred to Mrs. Greer; a voting register of the same year; three savings-account records; and the admission charts of the New York Eye and Ear Infirmary, where Mrs. Greer had twice been a patient.

As far as these documents showed, wherever Mrs. Greer stated the day of her birth she consistently said January 28, but the year varied from 1881 to 1884. In any event, if these documents were to be accepted, she could not have been the mother of Harold Segur.

Friedman had no documents to contradict this showing and had to content himself for the moment with the observation that Mrs. Greer had been very free with the selection of the year of her birth, and that she had undoubtedly indulged in a lady's privilege of making out that she was much younger than she actually was.

THE CASE against Segur was beginning to take shape like a military campaign on a battle map. There were three prongs of attack. One was to show that Segur had been born in the Boston Lying-In Hospital, the child of Addie Weston. A second was to produce strong, if not conclusive, evidence that Mrs. Greer had been of an age that would make it impossible for her to have been the mother of Harold Segur. The third, and by far the most difficult, was to show who Addie Weston was and thus to prove that the name "Addie Weston" was not, like "Polly Ernest," just another pseudonym for Mabel Seymour Greer. As to the identity of Addie Weston, however, Wells and Cox didn't have a clue.

The two lawyers had spent many hours discussing how they might trace Addie Weston. Nothing in the hospital records, other than a long outdated residence, indicated anything as to her whereabouts. Was she still alive? Had she married or changed her name? Where in the world might she have moved? Had there ever been such a person?

Only one possibility of locating her, dead or alive, presented itself, and the research this process would involve was something to contemplate. On the assumption, which was at least probable, that Addie Weston was a resident of Massachusetts, a painstaking search of county registries, deeds and wills might show the name

of Addie Weston appearing as one mentioned, for example, in a will of her father.

"It would be a wild-goose chase," commented Wells.

"Sure," admitted Cox, "but that is the way you catch a wild goose."

So, while they proceeded with the presentation of the evidence they had in hand, their assistants were set at the task of going from county seat to county seat in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts to see what the records relating to anyone by the name of Weston might disclose.

Henry Wise, the Boston lawyer, was the only living link with people who had known about Harold Segur's parentage. All he knew was hearsay, but he at least had been on the trail when the tracks were fresher. He was a methodical person who had catalogued his information well.

Under examination by Wells, Wise told of the investigation he had conducted for Harold Segur after the death of Mary T. Segur, who had also been his client. The letter regarding the adoption record in the files at the Boston Lying-In Hospital was produced and marked in evidence. After giving the judge time to read it Wells went on with his examination of Mr. Wise.

"Did you make any inquiry concerning the L. A. Cliff whose signature appears at the bottom of the record?" Wells inquired.

"Yes," the witness replied. "I knew him. He had been my family doctor."

What Dr. Cliff knew, then, had not died with him. It had been recorded in a memorandum which lawyer Wise had made of a conversation he had with Dr. Cliff in the doctor's office at 3:30 in the afternoon of January 14, 1928.

This was Dr. Cliff's story: Mary Theresa O'Donnell kept house for a construction engineer named Baker in Boston. When his work required that he go to Mexico she went with him as far as Atlanta. There a doctor told her she was pregnant and it was not safe for her to go to Mexico. She returned to Boston and evidently had a miscarriage. One day she called Dr. Cliff and said, "I want to adopt a baby for certain reasons. Do you know a baby two or

three weeks old?" The doctor said, "Only place is at McLean Street, Lying-In." She hired a woman to go down and get a boy baby, such loose practice being allowed in those days. (This would explain why the name "Mrs. Mary O'Donnell" on the adoption record was not in the handwriting of Mary Theresa O'Donnell.) The woman went the next day and brought back a three-week-old baby, light-blue eyes, "nearest thing to Baker you could imagine." Shortly afterward Baker returned. One day when Dr. Cliff was called in Mary Theresa got Baker to go out of the room and then said to the doctor, "He thinks this is my baby."

After the reading of his memorandum, Mr. Wise testified that he had never reported to Segur what Dr. Cliff had told him.

"Who else did you see, in addition to this Dr. Cliff, with regard to the determination of the parents of Harold Segur?" Wells asked.

"No one," the witness advised, "other than Dr. Willard Segur, from whom I tried to get some assistance."

This was significant. The judge listened intently to the following exchange.

"Will you tell us, Mr. Wise, in detail, of your attempts in that regard and the results of those attempts?"

"I asked Harold Segur," the lawyer replied, "whether Dr. Willard Segur might not be helpful, and I urged him to put queries to Dr. Segur. Later he told me that he had done so and learned nothing helpful. He then asked me to write to Dr. Segur, and I did. I wrote several letters, and one day Dr. Segur came to see me. I told him that Harold Segur had asked me to try to find out who his parents were and that Harold had said to me that he thought that he, Dr. Segur, could be helpful."

"Did he make any answer to your statements?"

"He was noncommunicative. He wouldn't answer. As I recall it, I put the question two or three times in two or three forms. Finally, in a rather angry tone, he said, 'I can't help you,' and he walked out."

THE TIME had now come, Wells felt, to deal with the Piping Rock incident. Wells shared the doubt which his associate Arm-

bruster had already cast on the credibility of Frank Reitman, who had been the Greers' chauffeur from 1930 to 1942. In addition, Wells had no interest, even though it aided in eliminating Harold Segur as the heir, in making it appear that a possible genuine heir was hovering around. Still, the story of the appearance at Piping Rock of a person purporting to be Mrs. Greer's son had entered into the evidence given by several witnesses, and Wells felt duty-bound to call Reitman as a witness.

After Reitman had related his version of the incident, placing its occurrence in August 1941, Wells, in his questioning, drew two possibly important points from him. First, Reitman testified that Mrs. Greer had told him that the child was born "somewhere around 1901 or 1902." This would mean that Harold Segur was far from a possibility. Second, on being shown a photograph of Harold Segur, Frank Reitman stated definitely that this was not the man who approached him at the Piping Rock Club.

In vigorous cross-examination, Friedman pulled no punches in suggesting that Reitman had repeatedly conjured up the appearance of this pretended son and had received payments from both Mr. and Mrs. Greer that were extraordinary. Prepared with canceled checks to back up his further questioning, Friedman then brought out that Reitman had received $250 from Mrs. Greer in August 1942, which he explained as being for some operation. From September 1942 to the end of the year, while unemployed, he received $150 a month from Mr. Greer, and later, in August 1943, Mr. Greer bought him a taxi which he thereafter used as a taxi operator.

With this showing, Friedman dismissed the witness.

Wells had almost reached the end of the evidence he had on hand. In fact, he had only three more witnesses to call, and their testimony, in each case dealing with the question of Mrs. Greer's age, was quickly disposed of.

Tom Touhy, who had preceded Frank Reitman as the Greers' chauffeur, testified that when he first saw Mrs. Greer around 1908 she appeared to be twenty-six or twenty-seven years old. He had last seen her in June 1946, shortly before her death, and at that time

she looked no more than sixty-five. Olin Chester Potter, proprietor of a restaurant in New York where the Greers had eaten frequently over the years, also testified that in June 1946 when he had last seen Mrs. Greer she had appeared to be about sixty-five. Mrs. Gertrude Winburn, receptionist for the photographer who had taken Mrs. Greer's wedding picture in 1908, and, as fate would have it, also a neighbor who in recent years had lived in the same apartment house as Mrs. Greer and had known her personally, stated that in her opinion Mrs. Greer was twenty-eight when the wedding picture was taken and sixty-six at the time of her death.

With the conclusion of this testimony, Wells asked for a conference of counsel with judge. The time had come to disclose to the court the efforts he and Cox were making to locate Addie Weston. Their agents, two young lawyers, had been scouring the Massachusetts countryside for weeks now, delving into musty records of long-forgotten transactions, but with no success thus far. More time was needed.

This would be their second request for an adjournment, and Wells and Cox had no doubt they were approaching the end of the court's indulgence. "If your Honor will grant a month's adjournment now," Wells said, after explaining their situation, "we will then be prepared to offer something definite as to the identity of Addie Weston or confess that we can find nothing more."

After consideration the judge agreed that, following Friedman's presentation of several rebuttal witnesses on the subject of Mrs. Greer's age, they would adjourn to August 11, at which time the case must finish.

The testimony of Friedman's witnesses, as expected, was in flat contradiction to that of the witnesses just presented by Wells. Mrs. Dessie Morris Delgado, a first cousin of Mr. Greer, who had known Mrs. Greer all her married life, stated that in 1908 her cousin's bride had been, in her opinion, between thirty-five and thirty-eight, and in 1945, when she had last seen Mrs. Greer, she had appeared to be at least seventy-four. Virginia Morris, who, as a saleswoman at Altman's department store, had often served Mrs. Greer, testified that Mrs. Greer had been around fifty when she first met her in 1920, and over seventy when they last met in 1941.

Saleswomen are good judges of age. They are accustomed to looking observantly at people. Nurses are perhaps even better. Yvonne Paridis was a registered nurse who had cared for Mr. Greer for two months during an illness in 1938. During that time she had seen Mrs. Greer every day and, Miss Paridis testified Mrs. Greer had told her in 1938 that she had a son fifty years old. That would exactly fit Harold Segur, born in 1888 or even 1887. Friedman hoped, therefore, that the judge would disregard the records and be persuaded that Mrs. Greer not only could have been but actually was Harold Segur's mother.

With this division of opinion and hope among the lawyers, the court adjourned for the period allowed Wells and Cox.

Essex, Middlesex, Suffolk, Norfolk, Bristol, Plymouth are the good English names of the counties of Massachusetts that ring Boston. By the end of the first week in July the two young lawyers working for Wells and Cox had completed the search of county records through Bristol. In Plymouth there were records of Westons so numerous that the searchers feared they would not have time to go farther afield. They hoped with a hope born of near exhaustion that here, if ever, Addie would be found.

It was on July 13, 1947, that the young men read the will of one William E. Weston of Duxbury, who had died in 1905 and left bequests to all his children: George, Maria, Etta, Eunice — and Addie.

"Open sesame!" shrieked one of the examiners.

"Eureka!" shouted the other. But finding an Addie Weston did not necessarily mean that she was the woman who sixty years before had borne a child in the Boston Lying-In Hospital.

There was one member of the Weston fa[illegible]w left in Duxbury — Etta, with the married name of Thompson. Mrs. Thompson was located and interviewed. Yes, she said, she was the sister of Addie. Addie had lived in Duxbury and died there in 1938. She had married Ernest H. Bailey, her first cousin, who still lived in Duxbury. No, she had had no children.

With hearts in their mouths the searchers asked the question on which everything turned: "Was this Addie's signature?"

But Mrs. Thompson was unable to identify the signature on the 1887 adoption record of the Boston Lying-In Hospital. She was able, however, to dig up an old geography textbook which had belonged to Addie and which contained two specimens of her signature. Addie's husband, Ernest H. Bailey, was able to produce a further specimen — on the flyleaf of a book, *The Life and Times of Wendell Phillips,* which had been in his home since his marriage in 1898.

The resemblance between these three signatures and the one on the hospital record satisfied the two lawyers that they had in fact reached the end of their search and, in late July 1947, the evidence of Etta Thompson and Ernest Bailey was formally recorded before a notary public in Duxbury.

The record thus made was duly submitted to the Surrogate when court reconvened on August 11.

At that time the handwriting experts were called in, and when their expert testimony was finished there was little doubt that, despite some change in the character of the writing over the years, the same person who had written in the geography book and in *The Life and Times of Wendell Phillips* had signed the record of the Lying-In Hospital, and that that person was Addie Weston, daughter of William E. and Jerusha Weston of Duxbury.

Friedman maintained a front of evincing no interest in the proceedings. He now had to concede that there was a real person answering to the name of Addie Weston and that she was not Mrs. Greer. But he still suggested that Addie Weston was only a blind for the real mother of the child, and in this contention he got some support from Mrs. Thompson and Mr. Bailey.

Mrs. Thompson testified for him that Addie had lived with the family in Duxbury in 1887 and had presented no appearance of being pregnant at that time. Mr. Bailey testified that "all this came as a thunderbolt." He had considered his former wife a virgin when he married her in 1898.

Here was a vignette of drama all its own — the strange oblique course a case can take, suddenly involving people never dreaming that they could have the remotest connection with it, shattering lifelong confidences and laying bare secrets never shared with any-

one. But Friedman did not pause to give this thought. By the testimony of one more witness whom he was holding in reserve he hoped, in the final hour, to tip the scales in his client's favor.

JOHN H. SCHOONMAKER had thin white hair, a long face strongly lined with the years. He sat erect in the witness chair, despite his seventy-nine years.

He had lived in Ware, Massachusetts, all his life. He had practiced law in Ware since his admission to the bar in 1894, and had served a term as the local judge. He had known Dr. Segur all the years that the doctor lived and practiced medicine in Ware and before that when the doctor had lived in Enfield, seven miles away. He had acted as Dr. Segur's attorney whenever the doctor required legal services, as upon the occasion of his divorce in 1906.

"Now," said Friedman, "at or prior to the time of the divorce action brought by Dr. Segur against Mary T. Segur, did Dr. Segur speak to you concerning his family?" the lawyer inquired.

"He spoke of a boy called Harry Segur, whom he had adopted some years before," the witness answered.

"Did Dr. Segur ever tell you who the real father of Harold or Harry Segur was?"

"He told me he was the father."

"Did he say who was the mother of Harry Segur?"

"He said a young woman whom he had got in trouble."

"Is that all he said?"

"That was all."

"Did he state the year?"

"No."

"Did he state the place?"

"Yes, he stated the place — Boston."

Much cross-examination followed, but all it brought out was that, until recent inquiry was made of him, the witness had never told anyone of this conversation with Dr. Segur, not even his son with whom he had been practicing law for many years.

Thus the trial ended, with wonderment on the part of Wells and Cox and high hopes on the part of Friedman. All awaited the final say of the judge.

THE TRIAL JUDGE carries a heavy responsibility, especially when he alone must decide the case on the facts as well as on the law. His responsibility is eased considerably when he has a jury of twelve good men and true who become the judges of the facts, and when he must only rule on the admissibility of evidence and instruct the jury in the applicable law to guide their deliberations.

The Greer case was extremely complicated, with conflicting testimony in respect to opinions as well as facts. A judge most keenly feels his responsibility when he must determine credibility as between witnesses.

It was in the heat of August and after the sweat of counsel had amassed a record of 1500 pages of testimony and a heap of exhibits that the trial of the Greer case was concluded. It was on a cold winter day, December 5, 1947, that Surrogate Delehanty handed down his decision. In the meantime the attorneys had prepared and exchanged briefs and had written reply briefs, marshaling their arguments, meeting the opposing arguments, summarizing, explaining, reconciling, emphasizing and discounting the evidence. And the learned, conscientious Surrogate, amid the consideration of other cases, had been poring over the written record, refreshing his recollection of the testimony, weighing the evidence.

In his decision, when he handed it down, the judge began by noting that the burden of proof was on the claimant, Harold Segur, to establish that he was Mrs. Greer's son. Dealing with the evidence, the judge observed: "Mrs. Greer appears to have been under an irresistible compulsion to speak of her youthful error. We may put aside for the moment any differences in the factual recitals reportedly emanating from her, for there is one matter in respect of which the stories of all witnesses who spoke of her confidences are consistent. She consistently said that her child was born in a house which she characterized either as a boardinghouse or a private nursing home. She consistently said that she left the child with the woman in charge of the house and that she never saw the child again from the time she herself was able to leave the house."

Taking up then the date and place of birth of Harold Segur, the judge concluded that so far as the record submitted by the claim-

ant "contains affirmative proof as to Harold Segur's origin, it identifies him as the child born in 1887, at the Boston Lying-In Hospital, to a woman concededly not Mrs. Greer."

Delving into Mrs. Greer's declarations concerning the adoption of her child by Dr. Segur and Harold Segur's reliance on those declarations, the Surrogate said: "His case rests principally upon declarations of Mrs. Greer that her child was adopted by Willard B. Segur and had been brought up by him. The genesis of her statements, revealed in the testimony of her maid, indicates very clearly that Mrs. Greer had drawn a hasty inference from the news accounts of Dr. Segur's death, which said that he was survived by an adopted son. Her declarations as to the identity of her child are shown to be based wholly on supposition or speculation on her part."

The matter of Mrs. Greer's age, which loomed so large in the case, was quite briefly disposed of by the court on the basis of the records, which to his mind were not sufficiently contradicted by other evidence.

The judge did not neglect the testimony of Jennie Sheppard. "The presence at the trial of this witness illustrates the well-known fact that wide publicity of cases which have in them elements which stir public interest almost always produces a crop of so-called 'witnesses' who have become deluded into the belief that matters which they read about in public prints are matters with which they have had some personal contact. The witness Sheppard falls into that category. The court is satisfied from the content of her testimony and its own observation of her that she had no knowledge of Mrs. Greer and no contact with her. What she undertook to say is wholly without substance and without weight."

The ultimate conclusion was thus reached and stated that Harold Segur had failed to establish that he was the son of Mabel Seymour Greer.

Thus ended the Greer case — or so thought all who read the Surrogate's opinion that day.

There would still be a will contest of the conventional kind,

between the Public Administrator and Mrs. Greer's attorneys, turning on the simple issue of her mental competency at the time she made her will. But this would be a rather uninteresting aftermath as compared with the issue which had so absorbed the public.

Of all those in the courtroom that December day, only one man, Joseph A. Cox, knew that the drama of the Greer case had yet another act.

THE alcoholic ward of the Boston City Hospital is not a pretty place. Case histories here are a catalogue of tragedy. The intern who drew the sheet over the unfortunate at 1:30 in the morning of August 19, 1947, recorded: "Immediate cause of death: Cirrhosis of the liver — alcoholism." The admission record told more: Birthplace — Boston. Father — Unknown. Mother — Unknown. Marital history — Single. Children — None. Age — 53. Occupation — Carnival worker.

"Hell," muttered the doctor, "the fellow never belonged."

Then he made the closing entry: "Place of burial — Mt. Hope" — a pauper's grave.

THE DAY the trial ended Cox had called in one of the young assistants who had been so helpful in tracking down Addie Weston, and commented, "I am satisfied that Harold Segur is not the son and that the judge will so find. But we have no more idea than when we started who is. We can't find him alive — no leads. He may be dead. But as you go over the incoming death reports, just keep an eye out for a Segur or Seymour. And for good measure, ask one of the public administrators in Boston to give you a flash on any death there of a Segur or Seymour. The chance is a long one, but it's the only one left."

One morning a month later the young lawyer burst into Cox's office. "Chief," he shouted, "what do you think of this — a death in Boston on August nineteenth of a man named Seymour, age fifty-three. And guess what! His first name is Willard!"

That afternoon Cox took the Merchants' Limited to Boston. He was cordially received there, not only by the Public Administrator

but by the Attorney General of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. If it could be proved that the carnival roustabout who occupied the least regarded bit of Massachusetts earth had been born the son of Mabel Seymour, the right to contest her will and lay claim to her estate accrued to the state of Massachusetts. It was to the Surrogate's Court of New York, however, that the state of Massachusetts would have to go to assert its claim.

The Bay State officials who learned that day of Mabel Seymour Greer listened respectfully and with growing enthusiasm to Cox's suggestions for tracking down the origins of the man in whom they were interested.

Cox left his conferees full of ideas and with quite a chore on their hands. The case might be there — he had blocked out the prospecting — but they would have to do the digging. Only Massachusetts officials can go about the state of Massachusetts, subpoenaing the records of banks and state and private agencies, to see if they can lay claim to a hidden fortune.

Four months later, on a January day in 1948, Joseph Cox stood at the large table across the room from his desk, looking down on the assortment of pieces — reports, letters, records and photostats — spread over the table, and he rubbed his hands with satisfaction. They represented the accumulation of information collected over the past several months in Boston, Philadelphia and New York.

"Get Mr. Wells on the phone for me, please," he said to his secretary. And then, when Wells came on, "Frank, do you remember the Greer case? I thought you might be interested in learning that I have found the son."

There was a speechless moment at the other end of the line before Wells said, "Here we go again."

"Yes, Frank, here we go again," Cox assured him, "but this is the real thing. Wouldn't you like to have a look at my collection of documents, before I show them to the judge?"

From East Springfield Street to St. Botolph Street in the South End of Boston is only a half-dozen blocks. For the brown-haired, hazel-eyed baby that was born at 16 East Springfield Street on May,

27, 1894, to the gray-haired, sullen-eyed man who left his two-dollar-a-week lodging in St. Botolph Street to die in the Boston City Hospital in August 1947, the peregrination was half a century.

He never knew a father. As a small child he knew his mother. He could not remember living with her, although she kept him with her in various rooming houses about Boston for the first year and a half of his life. Then he was boarded out, but she would come and see him or write or send him presents.

It could not be said that he never had a chance. He was always housed and fed and clothed. Mrs. Mary Colson took him into her Dorchester home when he was two years old and gave him care far beyond her bargain. His mother had agreed to pay her three dollars a week for support of the child, but the payments stopped after two years. The mother moved to Philadelphia, where she lived at various addresses under the name of Everett. She wrote Mrs. Colson many promises of payment, but only $15 was paid over the next three years, and the board bill ran up to $500 before Mrs. Colson's patience and charity were exhausted.

When the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, at Mrs. Colson's request, went to court to have the boy declared a neglected child and committed to the State Board of Charity, the mother was not unmindful of the proceeding. She wrote Mrs. Colson asking for more time and advising that she was applying to the Philadelphia Children's Aid Society for help. She even said she was consulting a lawyer, and on the eve of the court proceeding Mrs. Colson received a telegram over the name of a Philadelphia lawyer asking for a stay of the proceeding. But the judge said that he couldn't tell whether the telegram was genuine and that after such a long period of neglect there was no justification in putting off further the state's taking custodial care of the child.

The care was good and extended over the next eight years, or until the boy was sixteen. At all times he was in a good home and good school. The entries in the long running record continued for a while to note that the boy remained in good health and that he was doing well at home and school. In December 1902 his mother wrote from Philadelphia inquiring about the child.

But in another year the reporting was of a different character.

The boy had turned rather sickly and was not doing well at home or at school. His mother came to see him in June 1905 and in the fall wrote to him from a New York address. At Christmas she sent him some nice presents. That was the last that was heard from her. She disappeared from the boy's life.

In 1906, when he was twelve, the boy's behavior went from bad to worse. There was a succession of changes in his living arrangements because no one wanted to keep him. His schoolwork deteriorated, but he finished grade school and was given a chance at higher education at the Governor Dummer Academy. From this institution he was expelled before the end of the first term with the remark: "Should have entered a jail."

He did enter a jail seven years later. It was a crime of weakness, not of violence, a yielding to the pressure of poverty, a petty theft from his employer. Then he changed his name, a break with the past, a past without an anchor. William B. Smith was born, a man of his own creation.

But neither the world nor his ability to cope with it changed. He never stole again. He worked. He worked as an expressman, a boilermaker's helper, an attendant at a state hospital, a cook at CCC camps, a WPA laborer and, in 1940, when he was laid off, he reached St. Botolph Street and his two-dollar-a-week basement room, for which he could not even pay the rent. William B. Smith had come to his end. The forms which the Public Welfare Department required one to fill out for home relief called for a personal-history statement. Willard Seymour returned to the world of public charity.

He had one job after that, as a laborer at the Boston Port of Embarkation. He couldn't hold the job, but he continued to live at St. Botolph Street. Only odd jobs as a carnival worker and circus roustabout were available thereafter. His only asset was a social-security number, which also served as an identification tag.

He became sick as well as alcoholic. On July 30, 1947, he had to go to the hospital. That was the day a coterie of lawyers gathered in the neighboring town of Duxbury to document the life of Addie Weston and rule out Harold Segur as the heir to half a million dollars. And on August 19, Willard Seymour died.

"You see," Cox explained to Wells, "the Boston City Hospital record stated that the man was fifty-three years old. We then went after a corresponding birth record and found it. Here it is, my Exhibit One, and it all but proves the case by itself."

Its significance was beyond denial — the certificate of a birth, made by one George E. Thompson, M.D., of a male child named Willard Blossom Segur, Jr., born at 16 East Springfield Street, Boston, on May 27, 1894, to Willard Blossom Segur, a physician, whose birthplace was Ohio, and Mabel Arevalo Seymour, whose birthplace was given as Spain.

"Spain!" Wells pounced on the word. "Mrs. Greer wasn't born in Spain. And the name 'Arevalo' doesn't go with her either."

"As for the 'Spain,' " Cox said, "you don't know where she was born. And 'Arevalo'! Don't forget 'Polly Ernest.' You will soon see how free and fancy she was about adopting names."

Cox next displayed for Wells's scrutiny a sheet from the Signature Book of the Boston Five-Cent Savings Bank, dated February 12, 1894. In this book there appeared the signature "Mabelle A. Seymour," undoubtedly in the handwriting of Mrs. Greer, giving her residence as 2 E. Brookline Street, her occupation as nurse, her place of birth England, and her age twenty-one. The transcript of the account, opened with a deposit of $12.50, told a short and sad financial story — a withdrawal the next day of $6 and four days later of another $6, leaving a balance of 50 cents, which was withdrawn on March 27, 1894.

Wells could not question now that Mrs. Greer had been in Boston just prior to the birth of the child Willard Blossom Segur, Jr., on May 27, 1894.

"If the age there given is correct she was born in 1873."

"Yes," commented Cox, "that is something which will interest Friedman. It's likely that we were wrong and he was right on the matter of age."

Cox now handed his visitor a packet of court papers. Wells looked them through — a complaint in the name of Mabel A. Seymour, and a summons of the Boston Court, both dated September 19, 1894, charging Willard B. Segur with being the father of Mabel Seymour's child born on May 28, 1894.

"But there is no signature of Mabel Seymour here to establish her identity," Wells pointed out hopefully.

"No, no signature," mused Cox. "They evidently didn't make the parties verify their pleadings in those days. But it is more than coincidence that a Mabel Seymour claimed that Willard Segur was the father of her child born at the time stated in the birth certificate."

"Suppose you are right," Wells countered. "Still you haven't established that the man Willard Seymour who died in Boston City Hospital in 1947 was the child of Mabel Seymour born in 1894."

"One step at a time," counseled Cox. He then produced the long record of the Massachusetts State Board of Charity, running from 1902 to 1910, accounting for its custody of "Willard B. Seymour, born May 28, 1894, child of Willard B. Segur and Mabel A. Seymour." The record made note of the fact that the putative father had denied paternity of the child and that a settlement in bastardy proceedings had been made out of court. Note was also made of all communications received from the mother, whether under the name Mabel Seymour from New York or Mary Everett from Philadelphia.

Finishing his perusal of these documents, Wells remarked, "This record ends in 1910. I still don't see that you have connected the ward of the State Board of Charity with the Willard Seymour who died thirty-seven years later."

"There will be no missing link," Cox assured him. "We don't have daily or yearly records thereafter, but Seymour shows up at sufficient intervals, and each one is connected with the same person. Take this 'Personal History Statement of Willard Seymour' that he made out in 1942 to get a job as patrolman at the Boston Port of Embarkation. Although he was not able to state at that time who his mother or father was, the telltale birth date is given — May 28, 1894 — and under 'Education' Governor Dummer Academy is listed. So, obviously, it is our man."

Wells studied the form, which also gave Seymour's address at that time as being 16 St. Botolph Street, and listed his changing employment over the years, and his social-security number, 029-8870. The last question on the form was "In case of emergency, notify _____." He had written in "No one to notify."

"That it was the same Willard Seymour is proved three ways," Cox said. "Here, look at the record of his admission to the Boston City Hospital on July 30, 1947, and the death certificate."

Wells observed the significant statements: Address — 16 St. Botolph Street. Education — Governor Dummer. Social-security number — 029-8870.

"Full cycle. You couldn't document your own life that well," was Cox's final, proud pronouncement.

"What about the Philadelphia and Everett features?" Wells objected. "Don't they suggest someone other than Mrs. Greer in the picture?"

"Not at all," snapped Cox. "Everett was just another name assumed by our lady, like Ernest and Arevalo. Again a savings-bank account tells the story."

He produced from another folder records from the Union Dime Savings Bank in New York. The required signature on an account opened on February 23, 1901, by Mabel Seymour was unquestionably in the handwriting of Mrs. Greer. She gave her address at that time as 244 West Fifty-first Street, New York City, and her age as twenty-two. The two withdrawal slips, however, by which the $25 deposited in February were withdrawn in March, showed a Philadelphia address, and the checks were cashed at a Philadelphia bank.

"You haven't overlooked much, have you?" Wells said with evident appreciation.

"One can't," Cox rejoined, "when dealing with a supercritical fellow like you."

Lawsuits, like politics, can make strange bedfellows. When the Surrogate's Court was reconvened on June 25, 1948, and once more "The Matter of Mabel Seymour Greer" was called, Friedman and Wells were seated on the same side of the counsel table. Cox was on the other side, flanked by the Attorney General of Massachusetts and the Public Administrator from Boston. The Commonwealth was there to claim its own. Its first burden was to establish that the deceased Seymour was Mrs. Greer's son.

Cox's presentation of the evidence on this claim was as neat and

compact before the judge as it had been before Wells a few months back. Friedman was ready to join Wells in whatever attack they could make on the documentation. In fact, Friedman was somewhat more pleased with the prospect than was Wells. The newfound evidence supported his contention as to Mrs. Greer's age. Now he could argue that it was not only possible for her to have given birth to Harold Segur in 1888 but that Segur fitted her description of a child born to her in her "early teens," while the other child was born when she was twenty-one.

Friedman and Wells pointed out that the detailed record of the life of Willard Seymour was at variance with Mrs. Greer's descriptions of her child. Quite an array of variances was made out: Mrs. Greer had consistently stated that she had never seen or heard from her child since leaving it with an Irishwoman. No Irishwoman appeared in the life of Willard Seymour, and the record showed that his mother had maintained contact with the child over a period of years. Friedman reminded the judge that the Irishwoman went with Harold Segur.

Mrs. Greer had always referred to the father of her child as being a college student, taking premedical courses. When the child of 1894 was born, Dr. Segur had been in practice for two years. Again Friedman pointed out that the description given by Mrs. Greer fitted Harold Segur, who was born at a time when Dr. Segur was in college taking premedical courses.

Mrs. Greer had stated alternately that no doctor was present at the birth of her child and that the doctors who brought her child into the world were Dr. Harvey Cushing and a Dr. Derby, whereas a Dr. Thompson had attended at the birth of the child in 1894.

Of course, there was no adoption of the 1894 child, and Friedman continued to credit Mrs. Greer's statements that her child had been adopted by Dr. Segur.

All in all, both lawyers argued, the Public Administrator had not sustained the burden of proof. The new evidence, as well as the old, was much more consistent with Harold Segur's being the child, Friedman insisted. With the same ringing tone with which he had first asserted the claim of Harold Segur, he closed the case:

"Your Honor, the new evidence brought before you this day,

most importantly the evidence of Mrs. Greer's age, reinforces Harold Segur's claim. I feel that your Honor ruled against him at the last trial because it appeared that Mrs. Greer was born in 1881 and couldn't have been the mother of a child born in 1888. Now we know that Mrs. Greer was born at least as early as 1873 and certainly could have been the mother of Harold Segur. I beg your Honor to reconsider your former decision against my client and award him his rights."

The impassive judge with the slightest nod acknowledged the end of the case.

ONE MONTH later, in the ebb of another summer, the Surrogate pronounced the final word which a court could pronounce on the "Matter of Mabel Seymour Greer."

"The matter submitted for decision," he wrote, "concerns the right of the Public Administrator, as administrator of one Willard Seymour, to assert a claim against Mrs. Greer's estate. The central question is whether this individual is the illegitimate son born to Mabel Seymour Greer."

After pointing out once more that the burden of proof rested on the claimant, the judge concluded: "Re-examination in detail of the whole body of exhibits confirms the view formed by the court during the hearing that the required standard of proof has been met.

"There are discrepancies in the record, some arising from the exhibits themselves and some from the variances among the many reports Mrs. Greer gave of her early experience; but the whole is so persuasive as to leave no doubt in the mind of the court that the person who died at Boston City Hospital on August 19, 1947, under the name Willard Seymour, was in truth the son of Mrs. Greer."

THERE ARE postscripts and post-mortems to most lawsuits. The case ends, the court closes, but follow the parties to their homes and the lawyers to their offices and you will hear the regrets and recriminations, the rationalizations and reconciliations, and second guesses which may echo down the years.

The Greer case was ultimately settled. The trial and decision determined only the issue of heirship. The Commonwealth of Massachusetts became entitled to contest the validity of Mrs. Greer's will and to lay claim to her property. That meant another lawsuit. But there is a long-standing comity between the Commonwealth of Massachusetts and Harvard, the beneficiary of Mrs. Greer's will. They did not wish to litigate further the issue between them, and in the end they divided the financial stake.

Harold Segur still works at the same job which has occupied him for the past twenty years, satisfied, secure and respected. He still lives in his second-floor apartment on Auburn Street, Worcester, happy in his family and content in his certainty that Dr. Segur was his father.

Lester Friedman will concede that Willard Seymour was the son of Mrs. Greer. But he will stoutly maintain that Harold Segur was also her son. He has a theory which fits all the facts. He believes that the liaison between Dr. Segur and Mabel Seymour was of long duration, extending at least from 1887 to 1894, and that Harold Segur was their mutually acknowledged child, while Willard Seymour may not have been the son of Dr. Segur.

"Remember," he will say, "that Dr. Segur denied paternity of the child born in 1894. Mrs. Greer, left with sole responsibility for him, maintained contact with that child for years and disowned him only as favorable prospects for her life opened up. Then this child was put out of heart and mind — lost and forgotten as far as Mrs. Greer was concerned.

"Harold Segur, however, was a child whose whereabouts remained known, a 'safe place,' as she would say. 'Safe' for her as well as for him. Mary Theresa O'Donnell, the Irish lady, took him at birth and in due course Dr. Segur adopted him. He was anchored, and anchored, too, in Mrs. Greer's memory. He was a child she could identify and in time was willing, even anxious to identify. Hence everything she said to everybody respecting the identification of her child fits Harold Segur, not Willard Seymour — that he was born when she was sixteen and Dr. Segur was a college student, that he was taken at birth by an Irish lady, that she never saw him again and that he was adopted by his father.

"He was her son and should have been awarded a share in her estate," Friedman will conclude.

"Do you still think the Piping Rock incident was a fabrication of Frank Reitman?" he is sometimes asked.

"I don't know," he will say, "but the real significance of the Piping Rock incident was its impact on Mrs. Greer. She knew that Harold Segur would not put in such an appearance. Her fear was that the other son might turn up and ruin her life."

The Honorable Joseph A. Cox, now a Justice of the Supreme Court of the State of New York, is reflective about the Greer case in a different vein.

"No, Friedman is indulging his imagination," he will say. "He was misled originally, as we all were misled, by Mrs. Greer's statements to her employes and friends, and finally to her attorney. But in the end truth did out. It was quite different from the picture painted by Mrs. Greer, and it leaves no room for any claim that Harold Segur bore the remotest connection to her. He may have been the son of Dr. Segur, yes, but of Mrs. Greer, no.

"The Greer case was two cases and two Mrs. Greers. The first case was premised on her own representations of herself as reflected and repeated by her friends — a woman ten years younger than she actually was, who as a girl-mother, the victim of inexperience, had been caught in the toils of an illegitimate birth and, overwhelmed by the situation, had abandoned her child of necessity, but not without seeing that he was cared for.

"The second trial revealed the unvarnished facts and quite a different Mrs. Greer — a woman who was neither a very young girl nor inexperienced at the time of the birth of her child. She was a nurse. She was smart enough to hale the putative father of her child into court and press him for a settlement. Any professed belief of hers that Dr. Segur adopted her child must be weighed against her knowledge that he had contested the paternity charge and denied responsibility for her pregnancy.

"The explanation of the contradictions between Mrs. Greer's description of her child and the actual facts is psychological. All of her statements were excusatory and calculated to enlist the sympathy of those whose favorable opinion she sought. Then, too,

her conscience was eased by self-justifying alterations of the truth. She was not willing to admit to others that she had maintained contact with the child for years and turned her back on him only as she approached a better life for herself. Likewise she seized on the late information that Dr. Segur left an adopted son to identify her child with that man because it was what she would have liked to believe.

"What she said about doctors present at the delivery of the child also illustrates the point. She wasn't willing to tell the truth. So her earliest reported version was that no doctor was present at the birth of the child. When she came to her latest version in reporting to Armbruster, when her mind was slipping badly, she did some grandiose fancifying and called up the name of the famous Dr. Harvey Cushing."

Mr. Justice Cox will also explain that justice was done in the Greer case. "The fortune was not wasted. It was put to good use," he says. "The share taken by the state of Massachusetts was only partial reimbursement of the kind of expense a state is incurring all the time for the custody and care of children like Willard Seymour."

Francis D. Wells permits only a philosophical smile to cross his face when asked about the Greer case. "Very, very interesting" is his only comment. But he did make a sentimental journey to Boston, when the case was completely finished, to suggest that the Commonwealth of Massachusetts give belated recognition to Willard Seymour by placing a marker on his grave.

David W. Peck

David W. Peck is the distinguished Presiding Justice of the Appellate Division of the New York State Supreme Court, First Department. He first became interested in the Greer case when it came before his court on appeal. "I found that reading the voluminous record," he says, "was not a legal chore but an absorbing reading experience." He was moved to condense the testimony into book form, in part because it satisfied his liking for mystery stories laid in a courtroom setting, but also because it provided an excellent example of trial lawyers' work in discovering evidence.

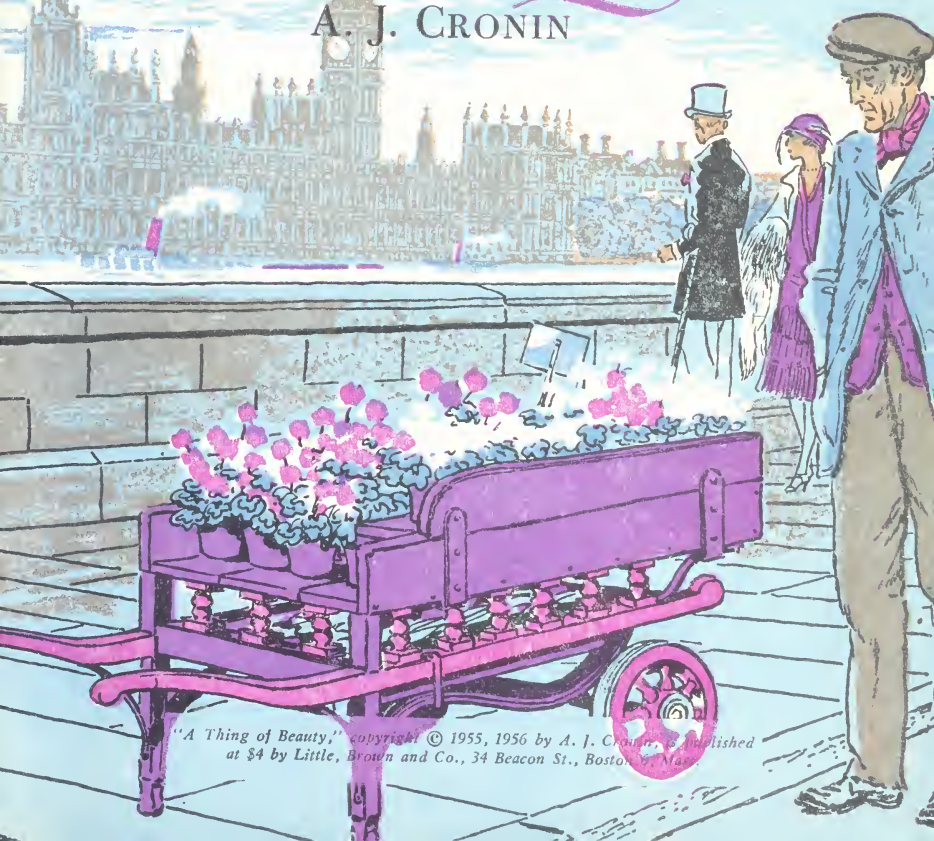
Justice Peck was born and educated in Indiana and took his law degree at Harvard. He was an Assistant United States Attorney in New York and a partner in the law firm of Sullivan and Cromwell before his first appointment as judge. He lives in New York, is married and has two sons.

Illustrations by Leslie Saalburg

A THING OF *Beauty*

A condensation of the book by

A. J. CRONIN



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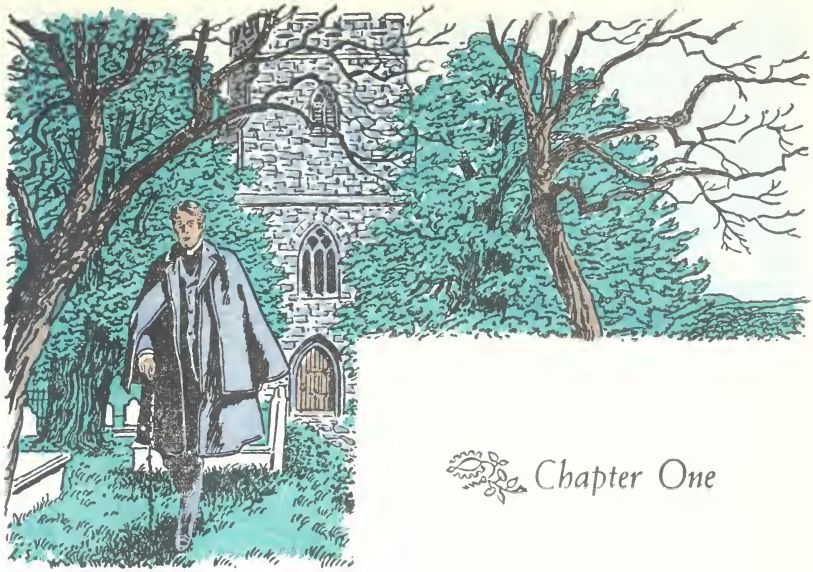


Chapter One

AFTERNOON had turned to evening and all the sweep and movement of the Downs lay still, bathed in pearly light. The drenched grass, silvered as with hoar, gave off a wispy vapor that hung cobwebs on the hedgerows, made lacework in the hollows of the fields. The dew ponds, saucers of skimmed milk, held no image of a yellow moon that watched, round and low, like the eye of a great cat, crouched on the hill, ready to lap.

Into this bright stillness, from a small Norman church there emerged, following the thud of oak and the clang of a heavy bolt, the figure of a clergyman, Bertram Desmonde, Rector of Stillwater.

Bareheaded, with a cape about his shoulders, he threaded the graveyard maze of lichened slabs, passed the two great twisted yews, of which the younger had undoubtedly made bows for Sussex archers five centuries before this evening in 1912, and went through the wicket to the lane. Here he paused and, with a long breath, drew in the beauty of his glebe, a good two hundred acres. Beneath him, bright with lights, stood the Rectory.

Solidly Georgian, with Palladian windows and a spacious portico supported by fluted columns, it was a real country house, built by his great-grandfather in 1780. Traces of an early Tudor building still persisted in the brick barn and stables, in the exquisite old wall of flint and rounded pebbles surrounding the large kitchen garden. Embosomed in soft lawns, bordered by beds of tulips and primulas, this house, home of the Desmondes for so many years, sent a proud warmth into the Rector's heart.

Almost certainly the Desmondes had come over with the Conqueror. One of them, the Sieur d'Esmonde, who had gone to the Crusades, lay beneath his marble effigy in the little downland church. They had served their country well in the three professions open to a gentleman: in the church, at the bar and in the army. The Rector's brother, Hubert, was now partially retired to Simla Lodge, some fifteen miles away, with the rank of general.

"A fine evenin' to you, sir."

Old Mould, the Rector's head gardener, who was also his sexton, was limping up the lane to close the church.

"Good evening, Mould. I've locked up, you may turn and go back with me. Stephen comes home tonight, you know."

"And high good news it be, sir. I hope he shall find time to come rabbiting along of me." He added more gravely: "We shall have him in the pulpit soon, belikes."

"He still has some way to go, Mould." Bertram smiled. "Though I daresay you'd rather hear a youngster fresh from Oxford than an old fogy like me."

"No, parson, I h'aint served the Desmondes fifty year without I come to know their quality. There be none better."

It needed only this touching proof of loyalty to set a seal upon the Rector's mood. Ah, this England, he thought: and here, the very heart of it, his little parish that would be Stephen's too, timeless and changeless as eternity.

"We shall want Albert to help with the luggage."

"I shall send him up, master, if he be home. I'm 'aving trouble with that boy o' mine."

"He will settle down in time," Bertram answered equably. "Don't be hard on him."

He parted from the old man and, some moments later, stood in the wide entrance hall of the Rectory, yielding his cape to his daughter, Caroline. "Not here yet?"

"No, Father. But they should not be long. Claire has gone to the station in her new motor."

"We really should get one of those contraptions." A light of whimsy relieved momentarily the austerity of Bertram's thin features. "Useful for parish visiting."

"You cannot be serious, Father. You know how strongly you object to the odor and the dust. And don't I do well enough for you with the pony cart?"

Her father's absent look as he waited for the sound of wheels punished her severely. Would he never appreciate her devotion, realize that her one desire was to serve him? From the first moment which began her long day she shouldered the burden of his household, supervised the farm, dealt with his correspondence.

"Is your mother coming down?" he asked.

"I think not. I bathed her forehead with cologne this afternoon. But the discomfort is still there."

"Then we shall be four at dinner."

"Only three. Claire cannot stay."

"A pity. Still . . . there will be other days."

She perceived that, despite his high regard for Claire, daughter of Lady Broughton of the neighboring Court, and his warm approval of the tacit understanding between her and his elder son, he was glad on this night to have Stephen to himself.

With an effort to keep her tone even, she said, "You look tired, Father. Don't let Stephen keep you up too late."

"Do not fuss, Caroline. And by the by, I hope you have something good for us to eat."

"There's mulligatawny soup, and the salmon Uncle Hubert sent us, with cucumber and green sauce, then a saddle of lamb with our own peas and new potatoes. For the sweet, Beasley has made that whipped apple charlotte Stephen likes so much."

"Well done, my dear. But isn't that the chug of the motor?" Advancing to the door, he threw it open, disclosing a small De Dion coupe, from which two figures emerged.

"Stephen!"

"How are you, Father? And you, Caroline? Davie isn't here?"

"Not yet . . . his school breaks up next Monday."

The fan of light from the portico revealed a slight figure struggling with a leather valise — Mould's boy had not appeared — a glimpse, also, of chiseled features in a narrow, thoughtful, sensitive face. Then came a tall girl in gauntlets and a long tweed coat. Her motoring bonnet, veil-draped, absurdly like a scone, could not quite destroy her air of quiet composure.

"Claire dear." The Rector took her arm in a near-paternal gesture. "Cannot you stay for dinner with us?"

"I do wish I might. But Mother has some tenants coming who cannot be put off."

"Ah well! One must pay for being lady of the manor. Is it not a sweet evening?"

"Perfect! Coming over from Halborough it was bright as day." Her voice softened as she turned her head, disclosing a pure profile. "Wasn't it beautiful, Stephen?" Her smile lingered for a moment in the darkness. "But I must not keep you. Good night. Come to us soon. . . ."

When she had gone, Bertram put his arm about his son's shoulders, led him into the house.

"It's good to have you home, Stephen. You are famished, I'm sure. Run up and see your mother. Then come to dinner."

And while Caroline heaved in a bag of books, which had been left on the porch, he stood watching Stephen ascend the stairs, looking upward with an expression of unguarded fondness.

After their excellent dinner, the Rector led his son to the study, a companionable room with a sporting flavor despite the desk bearing Pusey's Sermons, the Ecclesiastical Calendar and a folded purple stole. A pair of worn brown leather chairs flanked the hearthstone, and above the Adam mantel two bone-handled hunting crops were crossed beneath a mounted fox mask.

Bertram took up a dusty bottle and, having drawn the crumbling cork, poured out two glasses of port. He was a temperate man who touched alcohol only rarely, but this was an occasion to be marked, in the true family tradition.

"Your grandfather laid this down," he remarked, holding the dark purplish wine to the light.

Stephen, who detested port, made a murmur of appreciation as he raised the glass to his lips. "It seems very sound, sir."

"Yes, your grandfather knew what he was doing. He was a good man, Stephen. A true English country gentleman. One could wish no finer epitaph."

"My grandmother, too," Stephen prompted dutifully, for he had resolved to be unreservedly filial. "She was not far behind him."

Bertram's smile faded. "She was an indomitable woman," he said, "immensely charitable. And devoted to my father."

Could it be that the Rector was thinking of his own marriage? He straightened now and sipped his port, aware that he must break the constrained silence that had fallen between himself and Stephen. How strange it was to care so deeply, and yet to sense this embarrassment whenever they were alone together. He never experienced such lack of ease in the company of his two other children. Of course, he was fond of Caroline, but her homeliness jarred, unconsciously, his sense of family pride. As for David, now nearly thirteen, here, alas, his love was swamped by disappointment and pity. To think that any son of his should be an epileptic!

"It's good you finished so well at Oxford. You've done splendidly."

"Oh, I don't know. I seemed to lose heart at the end."

"I felt like that too, when I came down from Trinity, though I loved it just as much as you."

Stephen was silent. How could he tell his father that he had hated the university: the sense of being outside of life, the endless preoccupation with sports. How could he tell him, above all, his detestation of the career ordained for him.

But the Rector had resumed. "You have earned a holiday. Claire wants you over for tennis. And Uncle Hubert has asked you to Simla Lodge. Your cousin Geoffrey is there, on short leave."

Again Stephen did not answer, and Bertram began to question if his son were not suppressing signs of strain. His natural pallor seemed intensified and his eyes held that darkness which had since his earliest days been a symptom of emotional or physical distress.

I hope he is not sickening for something, thought Bertram, and quickly he declared: "You must certainly have a rest. No need for you to go to the Settlement until June. Allowing six months for London, your ordination would then be at Christmas."

Stephen had foreseen and dreaded this moment, tried, on his friend Glyn's advice, to hasten it, written a score of letters and always torn them up. Now it was upon him.

"Father . . . I do not want to go on and take orders."

The Rector's expression did not change. Sudden and complete surprise had fixed his features in a semblance of normality. "Not take orders?" he said.

"I feel I am not suited to the church. I'm not good with people. I couldn't preach a decent sermon to save my life. . . ."

"These things will come." Bertram was frowning now. "My own sermons are not particularly brilliant. But they suffice."

"But, Father, I have no interest in the work. I feel I'm not fitted to succeed you here. . . ."

"You're tired, and run-down, my boy. You'll feel different after a few brisk tramps on the Downs."

"No, Father." Stephen tightened his will. "This has been coming on for a long time. Surely you understand what I mean . . . what I feel I must do with my life."

The Rector gazed in startled fashion at his son.

"Stephen . . . it is not that wild notion again?"

"Yes, Father."

Silence vibrated between them. The Rector got to his feet and began to pace the room. "My dear boy," he said, with great seriousness, "I have never tried to bind you to me through your sense of duty. Yet you must realize how completely I've built upon your following me here. Stillwater means so much to me. And your mother's invalidism, David's unhappy disability, the fact that you are my eldest," his voice shook slightly, "my much beloved son, have caused me to rest my hopes on you. Nevertheless, upon my honor, it is you I am thinking of and not myself, when I beg you to forget this fantastic dream."

Stephen lowered his gaze so that he might not see the slight twitching of his father's cheek.

"Surely I am entitled to my own life."

"Not that kind of life. To throw away your brilliant prospects, wreck your whole career, for a mere whim . . . it would be an outrage in the face of God. No, no. You are young for your years, Stephen. This mad idea seems all important now. But in a few years you'll smile at yourself for having even thought of it."

At this moment Stephen hated his father, yet was at the same time vanquished by the shamed consciousness of his paternal affection, and worst of all by a flood of childhood memories . . . of rides in the pony cart, his father idling with the reins, of picnics on the Avon, hot sunlight on cool water, of family carols sung before the Christmas tree. How could one tear up such binding roots?

Bertram laid his hand with touching diffidence upon his son's shoulder.

"You could not find it in your heart to go against me."

Stephen did not dare look up lest he should disgrace himself with tears. He was done for. And he had meant to fight so hard, had sworn to Glyn that he would win. "Very well," he mumbled at last. "I'll give the Settlement a trial and see what comes of it."

Bertram went upstairs slowly. Outside his wife's bedroom he hesitated, tapped gently, braced himself and entered.

Protected by a draft screen, Julia Desmonde lay reading in bed, beneath a satin coverlet. She was a shapely, well-preserved woman of forty-five, with an easy, indolent air, plump smooth features, and thick chestnut hair which billowed like a cloud across the pillow. Marking the place in her book, Julia directed toward her husband an inquiring glance.

"So we have Stephen home with us," he said.

"Yes . . . I thought the dear boy looked well."

She could be depended on to express, in her aristocratic, self-absorbed voice, an opinion exactly contrary to his own.

"How is the headache?"

"Better, thank you. I have just had a treatment."

He perceived, from the contraption on the side table, that she had just had her vibrations. On the fender a metal kettle hissed

out a plume of steam indicating that in fifteen minutes the bran extract would be mixed, or was it now dried seaweed? Then the hot-water bag would be refilled, the eye pads moistened and laid on for sleep. And again, though he fought the question with determined Christian charity, the thought assailed him: why had he ever married her?

She had been something of a beauty and a belle, and, as the only child of Sir Henry Marsden of Haselton Park, had been regarded in county society as the catch of the season. Who could have guessed that she would later on reveal such marked peculiarity?

Except for a few garden parties in their early years of marriage, when, trailing a frilled parasol, she moved gracefully about the lawns, she had, with unruffled resolution, refused to interest herself in the work of the parish. She preferred to spend her days sitting, overdressed, by her window, or in the rose garden, engaged upon an endless embroidery which she put down occasionally to make notes of what she should report to her physician whom she visited in London twice a month. Her children, whom she had borne with absent-minded ease, had been to her no more than momentary episodes. She had retreated within herself into a little world of happy hypochondria.

And who, in heaven's name, could have foretold that her father, until the age of seventy no more than an amiable eccentric addicted to mechanical pursuits, would, in his dotage, launch a grandiose project for the construction of a flying machine — not an ordinary machine such as that subsequently flown by Blériot across the Channel, but a weird contraption presumed capable of rising vertically from the ground: a helicopter. Sir Henry had defiled his lovely Park with sheds and hangar, spent money like water; in short, ruined himself. Haselton, which might have been Julia's, was now a girls' school, the great hangar a gymnasium.

Might it not be, thought Bertram, that something of this instability was now manifest in Stephen? Impossible. The boy too closely resembled him in mind and body. Yet in his anxiety he was tempted to seek some sort of consolation from his wife.

"My dear," he said, "while Stephen is with us I feel we should make an effort to take him out of himself."

Julia gazed at him in surprise. "My dear Bertram, you know very well that I cannot make an effort. And why should Stephen be taken *out* of himself?"

"I . . . I am concerned about him. He has always been an unusual boy. He is going through a difficult time."

"What do you mean, Bertram? Is Stephen ill?"

"I think he is far from well. But I see you have no wish to share my anxiety."

"If you wish to tell me, my dear, I have no objection to hearing you. But I think I did my part in bringing your children into the world. Afterward, you made them your responsibility. I have never interfered."

"True." He tried to repress his bitterness. "But, Julia, there is something in Stephen that I don't understand. What is really in his mind? Who are his friends? Don't you recollect when Geoffrey visited him at Trinity last year he found a most impossible person in his rooms? A down-at-heel artist, a Welshman who kept pressing Stephen to go to Paris. To paint!"

He had got it out at last, and tensely, almost beseechingly, he waited for her to speak.

"I must confess, Bertram, I see little harm in all this. When I was at Interlaken with Papa I did some delightful little water colors of the lake. Stephen has always liked to draw."

He bit his lip hard. "This is no childish hobby, Julia. For more than a year now, without a word to us, he has been traveling from Oxford to attend night art classes at the Slade."

"The Slade is a reputable institution. Stephen will have ample time to sketch between his sermons. And certainly drawing is soothing for the nerves."

Breathing somewhat quickly, he said: "I hope you are right, my dear. No doubt he will settle down when he gets into the swing of his work in London."

"No doubt he will. And Bertram, I have decided that I shall go to Cheltenham next month. There is a mineral in the waters there which I am told is excellent in promoting the flow of bile."

He said good night, in a low tone and quickly, lest he say something worse.

Chapter Two

On a drizzling afternoon six weeks later Stephen, returning from a round of house-to-house parish visiting, walked slowly along Clinker Street in East Stepney. The sulfurous overcast from the London docks made the narrow thoroughfare more dreary. No light, no color — only a row of deserted barrows, greasy cobblestones, a brewer's dray horse steaming in the rain, a passing omnibus splashing him with mud as he turned toward the Settlement.

This red brick structure, built into the line of broken-down stucco houses, reminded him of a small but efficient penitentiary. At that moment the front door swung open and the Warden, the Reverend Crispin Bliss, came out, umbrella poised, nose turned up to scent the weather, a tall, meager form encased to the heels in a long black mackintosh.

"Ah, Desmonde . . . back already?"

The tone was feebly cordial, that of a man, Stephen felt, who had tried to like him, and could not, despite the best intentions. The Reverend Crispin Bliss was a devoted clergyman, a man of sincere yet narrow piety, but his manner was unprepossessing: dry, academic, touchily superior.

He offered Stephen the shelter of his umbrella and inquired: "You did all of Skinners Row this afternoon?"

"Practically all, sir."

He did not confess that, since he expected a visit from Richard Glyn, he had scamped the odd numbers.

"How did you find old Mrs. Blimey?"

"Not altogether well, I'm afraid. As a matter of fact, I found her very drunk. I gave her five shillings yesterday to pay her room rent. She seems to have spent it on gin."

The Warden made a clicking sound with his tongue.

"Well . . . you will live and learn, Desmonde. You must not put temptation in the way of God's poor creatures."

"I suppose not. On the other hand, can one blame her for trying

to escape from her misery for a few hours? She has a bad chest, can't get sewing work, and has pawned nearly everything in her room. I couldn't help thinking that if any of us had been in the same position we might have done exactly the same thing."

"Come, come, Desmonde. We should never, please God, find ourselves in a like predicament." With a parting nod, somewhat distant, he stepped off, leaving Stephen to go upstairs to his narrow cubicle. The bed had not yet been made. The residents of the Settlement were supposed to do for themselves, but in the afternoon a little maid named Jenny Dill came in, ostensibly to supply the finishing touches, in reality to do most of the work. As Stephen flung himself into a Morris chair, he could hear her through the thin wall moving lightly in Loftus's room. Loftus, a very elegant young man in a sacerdotal way, always left Jenny plenty to do in the shape of shoes to polish, suits to brush and put away. In a few minutes there was a tap on Stephen's door and, bearing duster and pail, she came spryly in.

"Oh, sir, I beg your pardon . . ."

"That's all right, you go ahead."

He watched her absently as she began to strip the sheets and turn his mattress. She was a pleasant, trim little thing, with a high color on her cheekbones, bright brown eyes and black hair. She looked a typical Cockney girl, thoroughly competent and nobody's fool. Yet there was about her an air of simplicity, an innocence and, above all, a vigor, as though she could not contain the energy and delight which throbbed in her healthy young body. And as she moved about neatly, his hand went to the pencil and block upon the desk. With the pad upon his knee he began to draw.

Presently she went to the fireplace and began to clear out the ashes. When she made to rise, he stopped her abruptly.

"Please don't move, Jenny."

Obediently, she held her stooping position.

"You think I'm quite mad, don't you, Jenny? All the others in the district do."

"Oh no, sir," she protested vigorously. "We do think you're a morsel queer, of course, giving the lads' club sketching and the like, not like the other student clergymen who teach them to box. Why,

when Mr. Geer had the lads you'd find them half killing one another. But all of us think that you're a very nice gentleman indeed."

"That's encouraging. Tell me, Jenny, if you were a bedridden old woman would you rather have a Bible or a bottle of gin?"

"I've got a Bible, sir. But sir, it'd depend how bad I was."

"Good Jenny. You're as honest as the day. Here, what do you think of this?"

She examined doubtfully the drawing he held out to her. "I don't know about such things, sir, but it seems proper clever."

"Why, you silly girl, can't you see that it's you?"

"Well, now you mention it, sir," she answered modestly, "it does seem to be my back view. Only I wish I didn't have on my old dress."

Stephen laughed. "You're an excellent model, Jenny. I wish you could pose for me. I'd give you five shillings an hour."

She looked at him quickly, then glanced away.

"That wouldn't be quite correct, would it, sir?"

"Oh, nonsense," he said. "Where's the harm?"

"Well, sir," she spoke awkwardly, and a warmer color came into her cheeks, "as a matter of fact, I could do with some extra cash now. You see . . . I expect to be married fairly soon."

"Congratulations. Who's the lucky man?"

"Alfred Baines, sir. He's steward on an Orient Line boat. He'll be home the month after next."

"Good for you, Jenny. Suppose you stay on for an hour, from five till six, twice a week. I could pay you five shillings a time, and if you didn't find the work too tiring I could give you a note to a friend of mine who teaches night classes at the Slade. He'd be glad to employ you for a short spell."

"He wouldn't expect, sir . . . ?" Jenny blushed crimson.

"Good heavens, no," Stephen said kindly. "You'd wear some sort of costume."

"Then I'd be very grateful to you, sir."

"Shall we call it a bargain?" He smiled, that rare smile that lit up his face so attractively, and held out his hand.

Still flushed, she came forward. Her small fingers were warm and dry in his. It was an extraordinarily pleasant little hand to hold,

the pulse of her young body was in it; he barely brought himself to relinquish it. When he did so she turned toward the door. She was rather pale now, and not looking at him she said:

"You've always treated me so nice, Mr. Desmonde, it's a pleasure to do things for you. And I've always given your room an extra polish because . . . well, just because it was you, sir." She broke off, and was gone.

Her words brought an odd warmth. But soon Stephen again became conscious of the dreariness which stretched ahead. He wished that Glyn might come soon. He detested the life he had been leading at the Settlement: the visiting, the Bible classes, the hypocrisy of feeding words to cold and hungry people, while he remained warm and well fed.

He could understand a man entering the church who was by nature deeply religious, who felt it his predestined mission to succor his fellow men. But had he not his own vocation, a call which kept ringing in his heart? What a fool he had been.

Just then heavy boots sounded on the wooden stairs, and a few seconds later a man some years older than Stephen burst into the room. He was of medium size and thickly built, with cropped red hair, a short bristling red beard and strong features. Dressed in moleskin trousers and a workman's jersey, a red spotted handkerchief knotted round his throat, he had the air of a buccaneer, boisterous, full of a vigorous enjoyment of life. He pulled out a gun-metal watch, attached to his person by a piece of frayed green picture cord.

"Just under the hour," he remarked with satisfaction. "Not bad, from Whitechapel."

"You walked all the way!"

"Ran," said Glyn. "What a thirst it's given me. I don't suppose you've a spot of beer?"

"We're not allowed to have it in our rooms. I can give you tea and biscuits."

Glyn burst out laughing. "How can you wrestle with Satan on biscuits and tea? But bring 'em on."

Stephen boiled a tin kettle on the gas ring and when the tea was brewed Richard drank four cups in an absent manner.

"Your exhibition has done well," Stephen said.

"Well enough," Glyn answered carelessly. "The critiques were so perfectly bloody they actually brought people in."

"But you did sell something?"

"One ruddy canvas. However, the cash takes me out of hock. Anna and I are off to Paris tomorrow. I'll live cheap and work like the devil. Paris is a wonderful place for work." He shot a swift glance at the other. "You still aren't coming along?"

"How can I?" Stephen muttered. "You know how I'm situated."

"I had the impression that you wanted to paint."

"Glyn . . . if I chucked everything . . . should I ever succeed as an artist?"

Glyn leaned forward, brows drawn down. "What a bloody idiotic question. What do you mean by success? Don't you know that you can't get guarantees in this game? If you're serious you give up everything, starve, steal, cheat your grandmother, just to get your hands on a tube of color and a palette knife. I believe you have talent, otherwise I shouldn't bother my head over you. I know how hard it is for you — bogged in tradition. You should have been like me, born in a miners' row in a rotten colliery town. You must make your own decision, and if it's no, I daresay you'll make a passable parson." He tugged out the nickel watch. "Well, I have to cut along. Good-by, Desmonde. Write me when you have time."

He gripped Stephen by the hand, and went out.

The Oxford-Cambridge cricket match was over and a party of seven could be observed in the fashionable throng moving slowly toward the main gates. Caroline and Claire were in front with Davie Desmonde and his cousin Geoffrey, while Stephen followed with General Desmonde and his wife. Stephen had only come that he might be with his brother, and Davie's enjoyment of the game had in some measure been his reward.

Now, as they left the grounds and stood together rather indecisively, the general's wife — Stephen rarely thought of her as Aunt Adelaide — spoke in her clipped "county" voice.

"Today has been so delightful it seems a pity to let it die prematurely." She turned to her husband.

General Desmonde surveyed the group. Tall, straight-featured, erect as a ramrod, even in his gray top hat and morning coat he looked a soldier. "I thought we might all go to supper at Frascati's."

"I say, what a lark," Geoffrey said, adjusting his embroidered waistcoat. He was a smart, if somewhat brainless, young man about town.

"Davie must be back by seven," Caroline interposed. "And it's after six now. I must take him to the train."

"Darling, you are so kind." Adelaide smiled. She did not want Caroline at Frascati's, in that hideous maroon frock which made her look like a parlormaid on her day off.

"I'm afraid I must get back, too," Stephen said. If Davie weren't going, he had no wish to be there.

"Surely you can stay, Stephen." Claire stood beside him, her soft complexion shaded by a wide-brimmed hat trimmed with roses. Today, more than ever, in this setting, she looked what she was — a most amiable English girl whose good sense and pleasant cordiality made friends for her wherever she went.

"Darling," Adelaide cut in, "we mustn't interfere with rules and regulations. We four must make the best of it. Geoffrey will take you, Claire, and I shall pretend that Hubert is my beau." Adelaide had her own reasons for not wishing Stephen to be of the party.

Good-bys were exchanged; then, vaguely conscious of the regret in Claire's eyes, Stephen moved away with Caroline and Davie. He saw them on their way and settled himself in an eastbound omnibus. As he rattled toward Stepney, a slow depression settled upon him. How physically and spiritually different from the others he had felt during the promenades round the grounds, the meetings and greetings, the luncheon in the Guards Club Marquee.

In this mood he reached the Settlement. In the hall, redolent of boiled beef and cabbage, he saw that there were no letters for him in the rack and went upstairs. And there, seated in a hard chair in the center of his room, wearing her outdoor clothes, a flat straw hat with a narrow ribbon, and white cotton gloves, was Jenny.

At his entrance she rose immediately and, while he gazed at her in surprise, she began: "I apologize for the liberty, sir. But there was no other place to wait. I'm leaving today, rather unexpected

like, and you've been so good to me I felt I had to say good-by."

"I'm sorry, Jenny. I didn't imagine you'd go so soon."

"Nor me neither, sir. But the truth is I'm found out."

"Found out?" he repeated, bewildered.

"Yes, sir." She nodded in her practical way, quite without embarrassment. "I didn't realize I was beginning to show. But there's no deceiving that cook. Yesterday, she ups to the Warden like a shot."

"What on earth are you talking about?"

"Don't you see, sir, I'm going to have a baby."

He was utterly taken aback. At last, feeling that his position demanded some moral reflection, he stammered: "Oh, Jenny . . . how could you?"

"We all have our feelings, sir. You can't get away from that. And Alf's a steady, respectable feller. We'll be married when he gets back."

"I suppose you're in love with him."

"I suppose I must be, sir." A faint, wise smile passed over her fresh young face. "He's a lot older than me, of course, but he's decent, is Alf. And accomplished too. He plays the harmonica."

"Well . . . we shall miss you, Jenny."

"I shall miss you, sir. I must say you've been more than kind. Not like some of the others. The Warden, he gave me a regular going-over."

"So you're not leaving of your own accord?"

"Oh, no, sir. The Warden couldn't have the place contaminated, he said, and sacked me on the spot. I only hope I haven't brought trouble on you. It's all come out about you getting me the job at the art class. And the Warden seemed terrible upset."

Stephen was disconcerted by this news. However, his genuine concern for Jenny, the admiration he felt for her courage, and his indignation at the treatment accorded her made him ignore himself. He fumbled in his pocketbook, then took a step toward her.

"Look, Jenny . . . I've no wish to offend you. But you've done so much for me here, and you really will need something to see you through."

Awkwardly he put in her hand a five-pound note which he had

folded small. But to his surprise, she would not have it; she rose abruptly, and backed away.

"No, sir, I couldn't. What I done for you was nothing. . . ."

While she retreated and he followed, tendering the money, the door opened and the Warden came into the room. There was a mortal silence while he stood in stony observation. Then, in a controlled voice, he said: "You may go now, Dill."

As Jenny went out, with tears flashing hotly in her eyes, Stephen was calm enough to take advantage of her distress and press the note into the pocket of her jacket.

"Good-by, Jenny," he murmured. "And the best of luck."

The Reverend Bliss closed the door behind her. "Desmonde," he said, "I surmised that your conduct had been indiscreet. But I never dreamed that it had gone as far as this."

Stephen swallowed the dry lump in his throat.

"I don't quite understand you."

"Come, come, Desmonde. You cannot deny that you have had that young person frequently with you, alone, in your room."

"Jenny came to do my room. And occasionally I made some sketches of her. I've tried to help her. That was all."

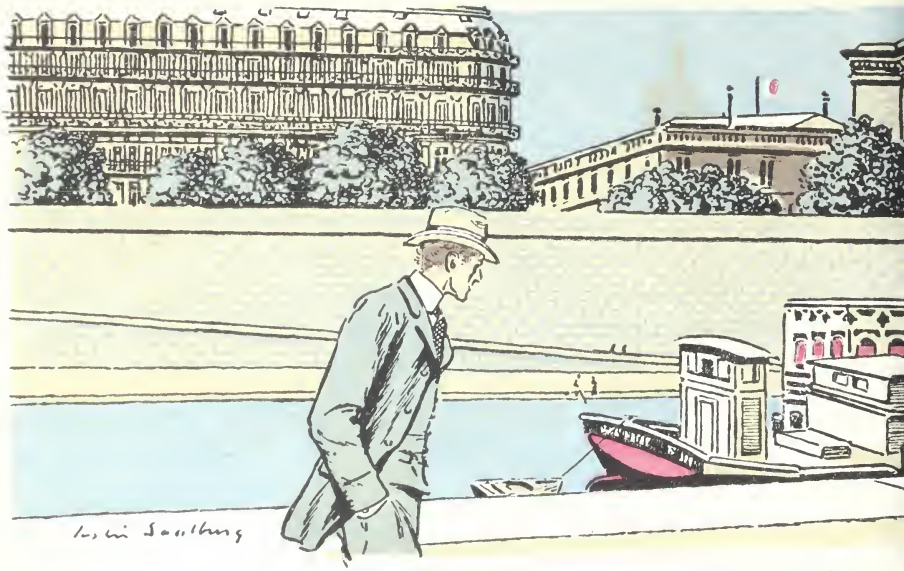
"So you thought it part of your duties, as a candidate for ordination, to make a model out of one of the servants of this house of God. I have made it my duty to examine some of the drawings and they strike me as questionable in the extreme. It appears that my standards of art as well as morality differ from your own."

"They certainly do." Stephen flung caution to the winds. "I should not have thrown that poor girl into the street."

"I daresay not." The Warden's nostrils narrowed and a scowl settled upon his forehead. "Although Dill has given a name to her guilty partner, I am not altogether convinced. It is my firm belief that, by the manner in which you utilized this unhappy girl for your so-called artistic ends, you are at least indirectly to blame for the state of depravity into which she has fallen."

Stephen burst out: "I never heard such rot. Jenny isn't depraved. Her sweetheart's going to marry her. Is it your idea of Christian charity to vilify her, and me, without cause?"

"Be silent, sir. I should ask you to leave the Settlement at once,



but out of regard for your family I am disposed to be lenient. I must give your father some idea of what has occurred. And *you* will give *me* your written pledge to abandon this obsession you are pleased to call 'art,' which is wholly incompatible with your vocation as a clergyman. There will be some further restrictions. Come to my study after prayers." He swung round and went out of the room.

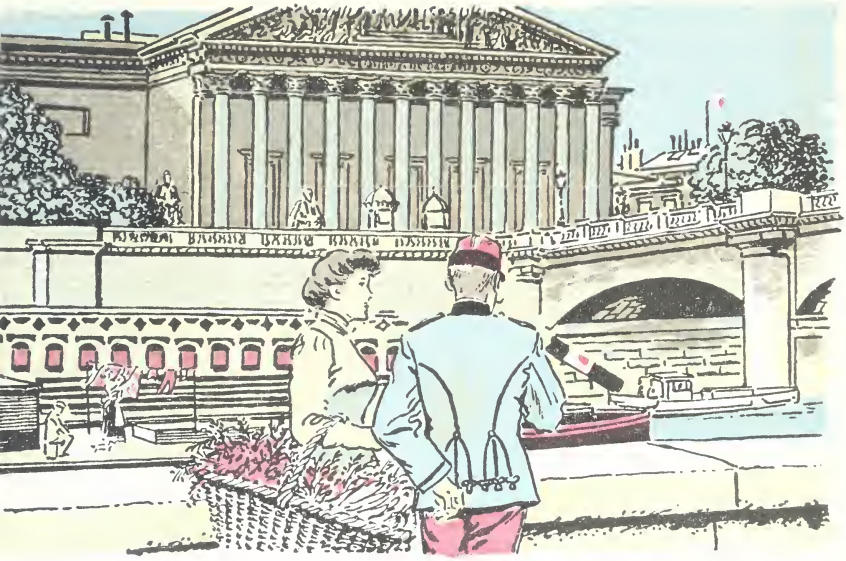
Desmonde stood tensely, with clenched fists. Then he sank into a chair by the table, drew writing paper from the drawer and seized a pen.

Dear Father,

I have done my best here and made a complete failure of it. I do not wish to take any final decision against your wishes, but I feel that I must go away for a while — a year, at least — to test my abilities in that particular field which is so distasteful to you I shall not even name it. I realize what a blow this will be to you, and my only excuse is — I simply cannot help myself.

My love to all at Stillwater and to Claire.

Stephen



Chapter Three

PARIS was unknown to Stephen and, although its first heady breath exhilarated him like wine, he entered it nervously. His immediate thought had been of Glyn, but in that strained moment of parting he had forgotten to ask for his address. Thus he went to a hotel he had heard his father mention, the Clifton in the Rue de la Sourdière.

This quiet, near-sepulchral place opened through a narrow entrance to a glassed-in courtyard around which the rooms were arranged behind flaking cast-iron balconies. Stephen's room was darkish and fusty, with faded wallpaper and an enormous red-curtained bed. He unpacked his valise, then, excitedly, left the hotel and walked at random along the Rue du Mont Thabor and through the Place de la Concorde to the Seine.

When he saw the long line of chestnut trees now in full foliage, by the river, he almost cried aloud. The Seine, steel-gray and polished, shimmered past a row of moored black barges. On one

of these a plump-breasted, yellow-haired young woman was stringing pink washing on a line. A little white dog capered at her ankles. A man in a jersey and billycock hat smoked placidly, bare-armed, on an upturned bucket.

In a kind of singing rapture Stephen slowly walked on. Only when the light faded did he start back toward his hotel. Now the city was stirring from its Sunday torpor. The little corner cafés had begun to fill up. Middle-class families began to take the air. Outside a baker's shop, not yet unshuttered, housewives were gathering to buy bread. I am in Paris, thought Stephen giddily, at last, at last.

Next morning, he set out for Montparnasse, having resolved to enroll in the renowned academy of Professor Dupret, in the Boulevard Seline.

The studio occupied the top floor of a queer barracks of a building that had once been an armory. The large, light room, heated by a huge Dutch stove, was crowded with perhaps fifty students, for the most part young men, of many nationalities — bearded Slavs, a dark-skinned Indian, blond Scandinavians, several young Americans.

The din was deafening — a continuous babble of conversation and loud snatches of song. Entering hesitantly, Stephen found a stool and set up his portfolio upon his knee. The model, an old man, was seated upon the central platform, leaning forward slightly, chin resting upon the back of his hand. Taking his charcoal, Stephen set to work.

At eleven o'clock Monsieur Dupret appeared — a handsome, erect man of about sixty whose tight-fitting frock coat gave him a distinguished air, intensified by the medal ribbon in his buttonhole. Noise ceased with his entry and he began to make a tour of the room, pausing here and there to scrutinize a canvas with narrowed eyes, to utter a few curt words, rather like a surgeon making the round of his wards. To Stephen the Professor said nothing whatsoever. He glanced at his drawing, and the next moment, without the flicker of an eyebrow, he was gone.

At one o'clock a bell rang. Immediately a yell went up, the model shuffled off the platform, the students began piling toward

the door. Suddenly, at his elbow, Stephen heard a pleasant voice.

"You're English, aren't you? I noticed you come in. My name's Chester."

Stephen turned his head and discovered a good-looking young man with an air of frank and engaging charm smiling down at him. Chester offered his hand. "I hope you don't mind my speaking to you. In this rabble we fellows from across the Channel ought to hang together. How about lunching with me?"

They set off together along the Boulevard.

The restaurant they entered was a narrow low-ceilinged cellar, opening into a dark little kitchen with a charcoal fire and roasting spit, filled by the clatter of copper pans and an agreeable aroma of cooking. Already the place was crowded, mainly by Dupret students, but Chester led the way through to a little yard adorned by tubs of privet and, calmly removing the card marked "Reserved" from a table, invited Stephen to be seated.

Immediately a stout, red-faced woman in black bustled out of the kitchen to protest. "No, no, Monsieur Harry . . . this place is reserved for Monsieur Lambert."

"Do not agitate yourself, Madame Chobert." Chester smiled. "You know Monsieur Lambert is my good friend."

Madame Chobert grumbled briefly, then, with a shrug, raised the slate which hung from her waist and offered the menu chalked upon it for their inspection.

During the meal Chester kept up a lively flow of talk, commenting upon their neighbors, sounding out Stephen with a few pleasant questions and revealing, with a deprecating smile, that his father had been a prominent tea planter in Ceylon, that his mother, now a widow, spoiled him with a generous allowance. He had been in Paris eighteen months. "It's tremendous fun," he concluded. "You must let me show you the ropes."

Stephen told him about himself, meanwhile studying his companion. Chester puzzled him, as he might be puzzled by an unfamiliar design.

They had finished their coffee, and people were beginning to leave. "Your friend Lambert doesn't seem to be coming," Stephen said.

Chester laughed. "Philip's an erratic beggar. You never know when he'll turn up . . . or with what attractive petticoat."

"Does he attend Dupret's?"

"He works at home, when he *does* work. He has private means, and he and his wife have rented a little apartment near the Esplanade des Invalides." Chester sat up. "Here's Philip now."

Stephen saw a slim, affected-looking man of about thirty, dressed in a short brown topcoat, with a low collar and a flowing tie. His pale face was deeply shadowed beneath the eyes. His glossy black hair was parted neatly in the middle, but on one side a lock fell in a little curl over his forehead. In general he conveyed the impression of indolence, boredom and conceit. He came over, peeling off a lemon-yellow glove and contemplating Chester with slightly contemptuous amusement. "Thank you for keeping my table, dear boy. But now you must clear out. I'm expecting a guest and I shan't need a chaperon."

"We're just going, Philip." Chester's tone had taken on a submissive inflection. "Look here, I'd like you to meet Desmonde. He joined us at Dupret's today. Desmonde just came down from Oxford last term."

"Indeed," exclaimed Lambert. "Which college, may I ask?"

"Trinity," said Stephen.

"Ah!" Lambert relaxed into a smile. "I am happy to meet you. I myself was there. Do come to tea at my house one day. We are at home most Wednesdays. Harry will bring you along."

The bill, presented by Madame Chobert, lay upon the table. Since Chester did not appear to see it Stephen picked it up and, despite Harry's sudden and energetic protests, paid.

Under the spell of his new freedom, Stephen fell into a most agreeable routine, the more so since a letter had arrived from the Rector which greatly relieved his mind. Obviously, his father wrote, Stephen's inclination was too strong to be resisted. It might therefore be "all for the best" if this interim of a year be regarded on both sides as a "proving ground."

Every morning Stephen rose, dressed quickly, and went out to a little restaurant round the corner from the hotel where he was

served a jug of steaming coffee and two flaky *croissants* still warm from the oven. His walk to Professor Dupret's studio was always a delight. The early housewives with arms crooked on laden baskets; a Zouave soldier in scarlet trousers; an old street cleaner sending a swirl of water along the gutter; the chime of bells; the lovely river, sparkling in the sun; all this entranced him.

At the studio, he did not yet feel at home. It seemed as if many of the students had come for sheer diversion. They laughed and sang, played rough practical jokes, affected an exaggerated bohemianism.

Professor Dupret's attitude toward Stephen remained impassive, although once or twice, after studying some piece of work, he glanced at him in a curious manner, almost as though seeing him for the first time.

More and more, Stephen began to discern that Dupret had no real interest in his students except when, with a stab of jealousy, he came upon evidence of a talent that might surpass his own. To have won recognition in official circles, to exhibit annually at the Salon a safe, carefully executed picture, to sit upon boards and committees — did these distinctions mean anything to one whose youthful ambition had been to rock the world with a tremendous masterpiece? Dupret was a hollow man.

At lunchtime Stephen usually went with Chester to Madame Chobert's, but occasionally he wandered alone along the quays, munching a roll with a slice of ham, then sped to the museums, to the Louvre or the Luxembourg. It would be almost dark when he left the long galleries and walked back to the Clifton.

To Chester it seemed extraordinary that Stephen should spend so many hours alone and several times he pressed him to visit the Lamberts with him. One Wednesday, Stephen accepted and toward four o'clock he set off for Harry's lodging. After a sharp climb of three flights of stairs, he became aware of a loud altercation, and pushing through the half-open door he found Chester arguing with a short man in a square black hat and drab overcoat who was busily engaged in stowing into a capacious burlap bag the mantel clock and other articles which decorated the room.

"Now if you please, your watch, Monsieur Chester."

"Oh, hang it all, Maurice," Chester pleaded, "not the watch. Not this time. Give me to the end of the week."

At this point Chester saw Stephen. For a moment he looked foolish, then he forced a confident smile. "Isn't it idiotic, Desmonde? I've just run over my allowance. And this wretched dun is stripping me. It's practically nothing. A couple of hundred francs . . . if you could by any chance . . ."

"I'll be glad to oblige you."

"Thanks awfully, old man. You shall have it back, with interest, the first of the month. Here you are, Maurice, you thief."

The bailiff counted the notes twice with a moist thumb, nodded silently, emptied the contents of the bag upon the table, and, with an enigmatic bow, slid out of the room.

With his good humor quite restored, Chester led the way downstairs, talking and laughing all the way to the Lamberts' apartment, which turned out to be small, dim and artistic. They were early, and Lambert, drowsing by the fire, barely lifted one heavy eyelid as they came in. But Mrs. Lambert, a tall, rather sharp-featured woman with large green eyes, welcomed them and presently brought in tea on a silver tray. Lambert yawned and stretched then. He gazed at Stephen. "Well . . . what have you been doing with yourself in this naughty city, Monsieur l'Abbé?"

Stephen reddened. Seeing that Chester had been talking about him, he explained the circumstances of his coming to Paris.

"Bravo, Abbé," Lambert exclaimed.

And Elise, with a flattering smile, murmured: "You must have wanted terribly to paint. Now have some more tea."

As Stephen rose to hand over his cup his eye was caught by three paintings arranged upon the wall. He paused, struck by the delicacy of the work. The paintings were small, and slight in subject — a spray of cherry blossoms in a blue bowl, two willow trees overhanging a stagnant pool — yet each had a decorative prettiness that enhanced the mere design.

"These are delightful," Stephen said.

Lambert pretended to shrug, but he was clearly gratified. "As a matter of fact, dear Abbé, they are my work," he said.

His wife, reaching out vivaciously, pressed Stephen's hand. "Phil does portraits too." Her green eyes lingered brightly. "If anyone you know should be interested in buying . . . I am the business partner."

After this a number of other guests arrived, all singularly appropriate to this atmosphere of refined bohemianism. Fresh tea was brought, Lambert poured whisky, the sound of conversation deepened, and presently Stephen rose to go. Mrs. Lambert accompanied him to the door. "Come picnicking with us up the river on Sunday," she said. "Philip has really taken to you."

On Sunday then, and on other days thereafter, Stephen accompanied the Lamberts and their friends to those lovely reaches of the Seine between Châtillon and Melun. They took the *bateau mouche,* the river boat, from the Pont Neuf to Ablon, where they hired a skiff and pulled with leisurely strokes against the slow green stream until, mooring at some riverside inn, they disembarked to lunch in the open air.

The sparkling sunshine, the flowers in bloom, the exercise, these congenial friends, the hoot of a barge, the color of a workman's blouse all awoke in Stephen a quivering ecstasy. Above all, the belief that he had found himself in the artistic life acted like a drug on him. At first he brought a sketchbook with him, longing to make a record of everything he saw, but Lambert discouraged him with a whimsical smile.

"You must store it all here, dear Abbé." He tapped his forehead. "Later on, in solitude, it will be born again."

One Sunday evening, after an excursion with the Lamberts, Stephen took leave of them and set out from the landing stage for his hotel. How well he felt! . . . Skin scorched by the sun, lungs full of country air . . . a kind of godlike satisfaction suffused him.

As he crossed the street a man stepped out of a narrow entry just ahead of him. He looked like a laborer, yet something in the set of the shoulders, the defiant carriage of the head made Stephen start. He hurried forward. "Glyn."

Richard Glyn swung round. "It's you, Desmonde. So you got over."

"Five weeks ago. And I've been hoping I'd run into you ever since. Do come and have dinner with me."

"I'd be glad of a bite. I've had nothing to eat all day."

"Good heavens, what have you been doing?"

"Painting," Glyn answered, with a kind of gloomy violence. "I'm apt to forget about lunch when I'm working." Taking Stephen's arm, he set out with him along the street.

Glyn's appearance, in red neckerchief and hobnail boots, caused a mild shocked stir in the Clifton dining room. Richard, however, did not seem to mind and glanced round with curiosity.

"Why in heaven's name do you stay in a place like this, Desmonde? Some evening I'll take you to a real eating house."

"Madame Chobert's?"

"Lord, no! Not that artistic hash shop! Now tell me what you've been up to."

Enthusiastically Stephen spoke of his morning "grind" at Dupret's, of his friendship with Chester and the Lamberts, of their expeditions. At first Glyn listened with a half-indulgent smile, but gradually his expression turned serious.

"Well!" he exclaimed. "You seem to have been busy. Perhaps you'll take me up to your room and we'll see what you've done."

"Oh, I haven't much to show you," Stephen answered. "Only a few sketches. I've been concentrating on line, you see."

"I see," said Glyn. From beneath knitted brows, he turned upon Stephen a steady gaze of extreme disfavor.

"Desmonde," he said. "Do you want to paint? Or fool your life away like one of these fancy characters in *La Bohème?*"

"I don't understand."

"Listen then. There are perhaps ten thousand impostors in this town who imagine they are artists because they study a little, sketch a little, and sit in the cafés all night gabbing. You're almost one of them. You're wasting your time, Desmonde. Painting means work, work and still more work. Not drifting down the Seine in a skiff with some half-baked poseurs."

Stephen flushed indignantly.

"You're unjust, Glyn. Lambert certainly has talent."

"What has he done? Some little things, fragments . . . oh, pretty

enough, I grant you, but he'd never be heard of if he weren't pushed by his wife. You have something that Lambert would give his soul to possess. I don't want to see you chuck it away. As for Harry Chester, how much has he sponged off you?"

Stephen's flush deepened. Chester now owed him more than five hundred francs.

"I tell you, Desmonde," Glyn went on more quietly, "you've landed in bad company and, worst of all, you've been slacking. The lowest pit in hell is occupied by the artist who does not work!"

A slow shame spread over Stephen. "What am I to do?" he said.

"First of all, get out of this Anglican rest home. Now. I can't ask you to stay with us. But my friend Papa Peyrat will be glad to have you share expenses. He's a queer old fish but a real painter, different from your fake bohemians. You're finished with Dupret, of course. You can use my studio."

There was an overwhelming force in Glyn's arguments. Stephen went to the office and settled his bill. He then packed his bag and had it brought downstairs, atoning for the unexpectedness of his departure by an indiscriminate distribution of gratuities.

Glyn, standing by in the passage, was chilly toward this tipping, and commented: "I advise you to hang onto your cash, Desmonde. You may need it before you're through. Come along."

"Wait, Glyn. They'll have to get us a cab."

"Are you too weak to walk?" Richard swung the heavy suitcase onto his shoulder and, followed by Stephen, strode out of the hotel.

It was a considerable distance to Peyrat's lodging but finally, in a dark little side street on the Left Bank, Glyn turned into a crooked entrance next to a pastry cook's shop and began ascending the stone stairs three at a time. On the second floor he paused, knocked on the door, then turned the handle and led Stephen into a living room, furnished with bourgeois neatness.

At an oilcloth-covered table sat a slight, round-shouldered man of about fifty, with a furrowed face and an untrimmed beard, who wore, despite the warmth of a stove in full blast, a dilapidated black overcoat turned up at the collar and a hard black hat. While a caged thrush with half its feathers gone piped an accompaniment, he played softly on the ocarina. At the sight of Glyn his clear, au-

dacious eyes lighted up. He put down the instrument and, rising, kissed Richard with affectionate formality upon both cheeks.

"Peyrat," said Glyn, "I've brought you your new lodger. He's a friend of mine. Stephen Desmonde."

"If he is your friend, *mon vieux,* then he will be mine. Forgive me for receiving you like this, Monsieur Desmonde. Richard knows how subject I am to drafts."

"I hope we are not disturbing you," Stephen said awkwardly.

"Far from it. In the evenings I am in the habit of contemplating my soul. Sometimes I find it splendid, sometimes hideous. Tonight," he smiled, "I welcome any distraction."

"Desmonde is a painter, Peyrat. He's going to work with us."

"Good," Peyrat said. "I make you welcome. Here we renounce the beauty of women and the brilliance of contemporary fame in order to produce masterpieces that will be acclaimed a thousand years after we are dead."

"What a hope!" exclaimed Glyn with ironic indulgence.

"It is that hope which alone keeps us alive."

"What about the blessed Thérèse?"

"Ah, yes. Truly, one is sustained by the example of that noble soul." He turned to Stephen. "Have you visited Spain?"

"No."

"Then someday we may make a pilgrimage together. To Ávila de los Caballeros, her birthplace."

Glyn burst out laughing. "I warn you, Desmonde. This madman, who never goes to church, has an absurd veneration for Sainte Thérèse."

Peyrat shook his head in reproof. "My friend, do not take in vain the name of that sweet and obstinate woman from Old Castile, who restored the original discalced order, that had been abandoned in the easy, gossiping life of the Carmelites. She fought her campaign with charm, humility, prayer and argument. She was a poet, too. . . ."

"I'll leave you to get acquainted," Glyn said with a grin. "Be at my studio at seven tomorrow, Desmonde. Good night."

He went out. Peyrat held out his hand to Stephen.

He said simply, "I hope you will be at home here."

Jerome Peyrat, known all over the Plaisance district as "Papa Peyrat," was of humble origin. His parents, of whom he spoke with pride, had been simple country people working a small farm near Nantes. For thirty years, as a government clerk, his days had been passed making entries in dusty ledgers at the Palais de Justice. Once, as clerk to a judicial commission, he had gone to India, and there he had spent all his leisure watching the animals in the Calcutta Zoo. Some months after his return he was retired with a minute pension. Then, never having manifested the faintest interest in art, he began not only to paint but to regard himself as a painter of genius. He had never had a lesson in his life. He painted portraits of his friends, streets, ugly buildings, wedding groups. He painted jungle compositions — a naked female form bestriding a snarling tiger amid a tangled undergrowth of palms, creepers, fern fronds, orchids, an imaginative forest, lush and stupendous, peopled by snakes and climbing apes.

These pictures were displayed for sale at fifteen francs each in the window of his friend Madame Huffnaegel, who kept the millinery shop a few doors down. Except for Napoleon Campo, a colorman, who had taken canvases from Peyrat in payment for materials, and whose attic admittedly was stored with junk from struggling artists — no one bought the pictures, which became to his neighbors a subject of hilarious if affectionate mirth. Yet Peyrat went on painting, eking out his meager pension by various devices. With some knowledge of music, he gave harmonica lessons to children and in the summer he played the French horn every Thursday afternoon in the orchestra which charmed the nursemaids and their charges in the Tuileries Gardens. And when necessity pressed too hard there was always the friend of his boyhood, Alphonse Bisque, the pastry cook, who could be relied upon to provide a meat pâté or a mutton pie.

Early though Stephen rose, Peyrat was up before him to take in the milk and new-baked bread which Alphonse's small boy delivered. Their simple breakfast over, he would wash the dishes; then, having fed the thrush, which he had found lame in the street and proposed to release when its wing had mended, he shouldered his easel and paintbox and set off on foot to some remote suburb.

where he lost himself in projecting upon canvas some celestial vision of a railway siding or a chimney stack.

Stephen set out at the same hour for Glyn's studio, hurrying to utilize the clear north light.

Glyn's wife, Anna, who was also his model, was a woman of thirty, tall and vigorous, with black hair and a gaunt, gypsy look. The planes of her face, with its high cheekbones, were flat and strong. Moving about the studio in her felt slippers, she was the most silent person Stephen had ever known. She would pose for long periods at a stretch, then without a word would slip out to the Halles, the great city market, and, returning with an armful of provisions, go over to the tiny stove to make a meal.

Glyn was incessant in his demand for originality, insisting that Stephen look at objects, not as they were represented by tradition, but with his own eyes. "Do as Peyrat does! Make every painting absolutely your own."

"You think highly of Peyrat?"

"I think he's great." Glyn spoke with conviction. "He has the direct vision of the primitive artist. They may laugh now but in twenty years they'll be scrambling for his stuff."

It was hard work — and cold. The studio was frigid. Gone forever was Stephen's earlier idea that painting was a soft, seductive art. Glyn was insatiable in his demand for ever greater effort. One day, when Stephen felt he could go on no longer, Richard threw down his palette.

"Exercise," he declared. "The top of my head's coming off. Can you use a bicycle?"

"Of course."

They left the studio and crossed the street to the bicycle shop kept by Pierre Berthelot, an old racing cyclist now incapacitated by a drink-damaged heart. It was a small, broken-down establishment with a row of bicycles strung up to the ceiling.

"Pierre!" Glyn shouted, rapping on the counter.

A girl of about nineteen appeared from the back. She was rather short, wore a black jersey and black pleated skirt, her feet in black slippers.

"It's you," said Glyn. "Why aren't you with the circus?"

"Laid up for the winter." She spoke ungraciously, hands on her hips, legs planted apart.

"Where's your papa?"

"Sleeping it off."

"Stephen, this is Emmy Berthelot." As she looked from one to the other in a bored manner he went on, "We want two machines for the afternoon. Good ones, now."

"They're all good. Take the two at the end."

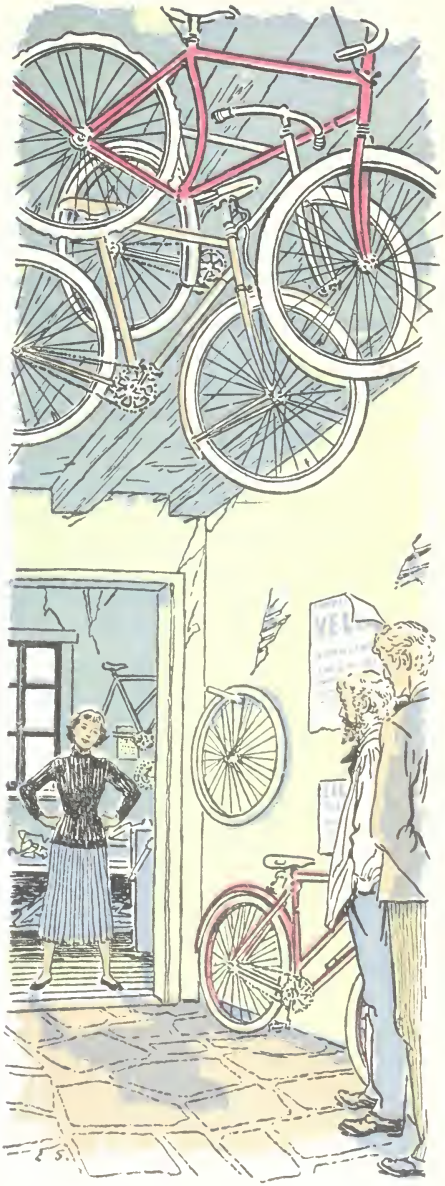
Glyn lowered the pulley ropes and Stephen watched her as she caught each machine in turn and spun the wheels expertly. She had a pale, sulky face, well-marked eyebrows, a wide, thin-lipped mouth. Her nose had a slum-quarter tilt at the tip. Except for her breasts, conspicuous under the tight jersey, she had the figure of a well-developed boy. Turning unexpectedly she caught Stephen's eyes on her. Under her cool appraising stare he felt himself reddening. Richard was wheeling the cycles to the door.

"Like to come, Emmy?"

"Got to watch the shop. Thanks to that old soak."

"Another time then. We'll be back before dark."

Stephen followed Glyn out to the street. They mounted and,



bent double over the downswept handle bars, moved off through the traffic. Outside the city gates Richard set a blinding pace. At last, after about thirty kilometers, he drew up sharp at a bar in the little village of Louveciennes. He looked critically at Stephen, dusty and sweaty, completely winded.

"Not bad, my boy. You don't like to give up, do you? It's a quality that may serve you. Come in and have a beer."

In the dark, low-ceilinged bar they each had a delicious cool bock. Glyn sucked the froth from his beard and sighed. "Good painting country, this. Renoir and Pissarro used to hang out here. But we'll push farther out next time. We'll get Emmy to set the pace. She can really go."

The recollection of the encounter in the bicycle shop still rankled with Stephen. He said stiffly:

"That young woman struck me as rather disagreeable."

Glyn gave a shout of laughter. "Moderate your language, padre. As a matter of fact, she is a cheap, tough little slut. Tours six months of the year with the Peroz circus. Does a risky trick cycling act and gets high billing. She has no use for us, really, knows we don't make a bean. But she's incredibly vain, and wants me to paint her."

"Shall you?"

"Not on your life. I don't deal in gutter types." He finished his beer. "Come on."

They rode back slowly in the cool of the evening. Glyn was in great spirits, purged of his nervous tension. Outside the bicycle shop he looked at his watch and whistled.

"I have to meet Anna. Take this in for me like a good chap." He turned over his machine to Stephen and rushed off.

Stephen maneuvered the two cycles into the shop. He knocked on the counter; then, as no one appeared, he pushed through the door that led to the back premises and in a dark little passage bumped into Emmy. He could find nothing to say, and all at once his pulse began to beat like a hammer. She stood close to him, watching him coolly through knowing, narrowed eyes as though his inner turmoil were perfectly apparent to her.

"What do you want?"

He heard the quick loud bumping of his heart. In an unnatural voice he answered: "I've brought back the machines."

She was making no attempt to move. At last he forced his hand to the door behind him and thrust it open. "I hope," he stammered like a schoolboy, "I hope I shall see you again."

He tried to dismiss her from his mind, but she grew upon him every time he saw her. With the coming of the spring, Glyn insisted on regular weekly rides and she accompanied them. She attracted and at the same time repelled Stephen. He longed to ask her to sit for him, but the opportunity seemed never to arise. She remained an unsolved puzzle, a strange irritant.

And time was passing. As the chestnuts broke into bloom again, he realized that his year of grace would soon be up. More and more the letters from home began to anticipate his return.

July came, and from brassy skies a stifling air pressed down upon the city. Glyn, who hated hot weather, suddenly decided to go to Brittany. Even Peyrat spoke of deserting Paris for a visit to an uncle in Auvergne. Both of them pressed Stephen to accompany them. But he could not accept — a severe letter had arrived from the Rector in which he hoped that Stephen would not allow himself to be detained by "the gaieties and distractions of Paris."

After he had read it, Stephen went back to work. But suddenly he threw down his brushes. He was dripping with perspiration. "What a life!" he thought. "And Father thinks my days are a round of pleasure!"

He went out to the Plaisance post office and sent a telegram.

DESMONDE, THE RECTORY, STILLWATER, SUSSEX. CROSSING MORNING BOAT TOMORROW JULY 19TH. STEPHEN.

Chapter Four

NOTHING, thought Stephen, exceeds the joy of revisiting loved, familiar places. Stretched on the grassy bank of Chillingham Lake, a fishing rod beside him, he was watching Davie cast a silver minnow among the flowering lily pads. The air

was clear and golden, the trees in fullest foliage; dog roses and meadowsweet breathed out their perfume.

Yes, it was good to be back — if only they would not treat him like the returned prodigal who must at all costs be secured by kindness: his favorite dishes at lunch and dinner, Mould bringing in baskets of the choicest fruit. The subject of his painting had not been discussed since that first evening when, at the Rector's request, he had displayed his canvases. His father had striven vainly to approve Stephen's work, his bewildered eye coming to rest upon a scene which portrayed a woman pegging a string of washing on a windy day.

"My dear boy, why, of all things, should you paint a clothesline?"

"It's the interplay of brilliant tones, Father, against the drab background." He had tried to explain how the raw colors were put on with a palette knife. Yet it was plain the Rector remained unconvinced. At last, after a final survey, his father turned doubtfully toward him.

"I suppose an expert might appreciate this."

"I think he might."

Thereafter consideration had, on all sides, supplanted criticism; and this afternoon Claire's mother, Lady Broughton, had invited Stephen and Davie for tea. With a glance at the sun, now slanting across the crest of the Downs, Stephen judged they had better be off. He strolled along the bank and stood behind his brother, whose catch, so far, had been a poor one — three small yellow perch. He wished that a large and worthy pike might impale itself upon the hook. Davie, he reflected sadly, never had any luck. And as his young brother reeled in his line Stephen put his arm about his shoulders and praised the three small fishes now curled dryly in the basket.

"Do you think they'll make good eating?" Davie asked hopefully.

"The smaller the sweeter," said Stephen.

They set off through the meadows, climbed the iron rail that fenced the park, and presently reached the Court, a massive pile of red sandstone.

Stephen had always liked Lady Broughton, and now, when she received them reclining on a chaise longue, asking to be excused because her doctor was being ridiculously severe with her, it pained him to observe the quick catch in her breathing, the faint purplish tinge in her cheeks.

Almost at once Claire entered, bareheaded, in a linen dress that matched the red gold in her hair.

"Claire." Stephen went toward her.

"It's so good to see you. And you, Davie." She smiled. To see Stephen again, to feel the touch of his fingers upon hers tested her composure more than she could have believed.

Just then tea was brought in, a regular schoolboy spread of boiled eggs and crumpets, sandwiches and johnnycakes, with strawberries and whipped Sussex cream.

"We thought you'd be hungry after your fishing," said Claire, looking at Davie.

"We are," he affirmed enthusiastically.

Everyone laughed, and after that they were a merry party. Davie entered into a lively discussion with Claire upon the methods of catching pike. They finally agreed that on such a day as this a May fly would have far surpassed a silver minnow.

"I believe there are some flies in the billiard room," Claire reflected, after tea. "Come along and we'll take a look."

When they had gone, Lady Broughton gazed meditatively at Stephen. It did not in the least distress her that he had given up the church — she considered him not cut out to be a country parson. Nor did his recent artistic adventures cause her uneasiness. These she regarded merely as a passing fancy which in no way detracted from the essential fineness of his character. Her knowledge of Claire's feelings for him made her wish to say something which might bring the matter to a head. Recently Geoffrey Desmonde had been a persistent visitor and Lady Broughton regarded him as a spoiled, conceited and affected young fop.

She said, "Claire and your cousin Geoffrey are very often together. He took her to Brooklands the other day for the motor racing."

"I didn't know Claire cared for that sort of thing."

"I don't think she does . . . I do worry about her a little, Stephen. To be happy she needs the right kind of companionship — shall I go further, and say the right kind of husband? I needn't tell you that I shan't be here forever. And although she loves this place, there are many responsibilities. . . ."

She had said nothing definite, yet there was no mistaking her intention. Before he could speak, she resumed. "I think you were wise to have that spell in Paris. In my day young men always made the grand tour. They came back, settled down as good landlords and raised families. That precisely is what you ought to do, dear Stephen."

"But supposing . . ." He avoided her gaze. "Supposing I felt I ought to go abroad again, to continue painting?"

She shook her head, indulgently patted his hand.

"My dear boy, when I was young and romantic I thought I could write poetry. I got over it, however. And so will you."

Before Stephen could answer Davie re-entered the room with Claire, carrying a japanned metal box. "Look, Stephen, Claire has given me all these lovely flies."

"Don't forget," Claire smiled, "we shall expect lots of fish."

Stephen stood up in preparation for departure, touched by the quiet thoughtfulness apparent in Claire's every word and gesture. The last glimmer of the afternoon gilded the long pillared room. Through the windows were the exquisite lawns, the beech woods with red roofs of cottages above, and beyond, rolling away like the sea, the green Downs.

On the way home, Davie said: "It is jolly at the Court. Don't you wish we could be there oftener?"

But Stephen gave no answer.

On the following Thursday luncheon at the Rectory was almost over. It had been a somewhat oppressive meal, for Davie was returning to school that afternoon. And Stephen was conscious of an intensification of that intangible coercion which had been brought to bear upon him during the past two weeks.

The Rector finished his coffee and, with his gaze on no one in particular, remarked: "It happens that Mr. Munsey Peters is in

the neighborhood. I have asked him to call this afternoon. You know Mr. Peters, Stephen?"

Inattentive, carving a face for Davie on a strip of orange peel, Stephen now looked up. "He is a well-known member of the Royal Academy."

There was a pause. Stephen waited for Bertram to spring the trap.

"We thought he might care to see your pictures."

There was a silence which Caroline broke hurriedly.

"Isn't that fortunate, Stephen? Now you can have the benefit of his advice."

"He is in the first rank," said Bertram. "You don't mind if we show him your paintings? Since the opportunity has arisen it might be wise to have his opinion."

Stephen had gone quite white. "Show him anything you like. His opinion is valueless."

"What! Munsey Peters is famous."

"What does that mean? Anything more vulgar and stupid than his pictures I can't imagine. . . ." He broke off, sensing that they would think him envious. Then, through the window, he saw the station cab draw up at the front door. A man in a broad-brimmed black hat and a black Inverness cape descended briskly and rang the bell. Bertram rose and, followed by his wife and Caroline, went into the hall. Stephen remained seated. It was obvious now that Peters, commissioned at a fee, had come specially from London, like a surgeon called to see a patient dangerously ill.

A reassuring touch on his shoulder recalled him. It was Davie.

"Hadn't we better go in now? Don't worry, Stephen, I'll bet you come out on top."

In the drawing room, Munsey Peters, plump, briskly officious, was seated on the sofa, coffee cup on knee. As Stephen entered he extended an amiable hand. Stephen told himself that he must entertain no rancor toward this unwelcome visitor who no doubt was acting in good faith. Yet knowing Peters' work, those woolly landscapes, he could not repress an instinctive aversion, enhanced by the man's smug appearance.

"So you've been in Paree, eh?" Peters said agreeably.

"Yes, just under a year."

"Working hard, I hope, in the gay city." This with a glance of veiled humor toward the others. "Who did you study under?"

"In the beginning — Dupret."

"Ah! What does he think of you?"

"I really don't know. I left him after a few weeks."

"Tut, tut! That was a mistake. D'you mean you've been mostly on your own? You can't have picked up much that way."

"At least I have learned how much will power, discipline and intense application are necessary to make a good artist."

"Humph! That's all very fine. But what about being taught? There are certain essentials. I've stressed them in my book. I daresay you've studied it."

"I'm afraid not."

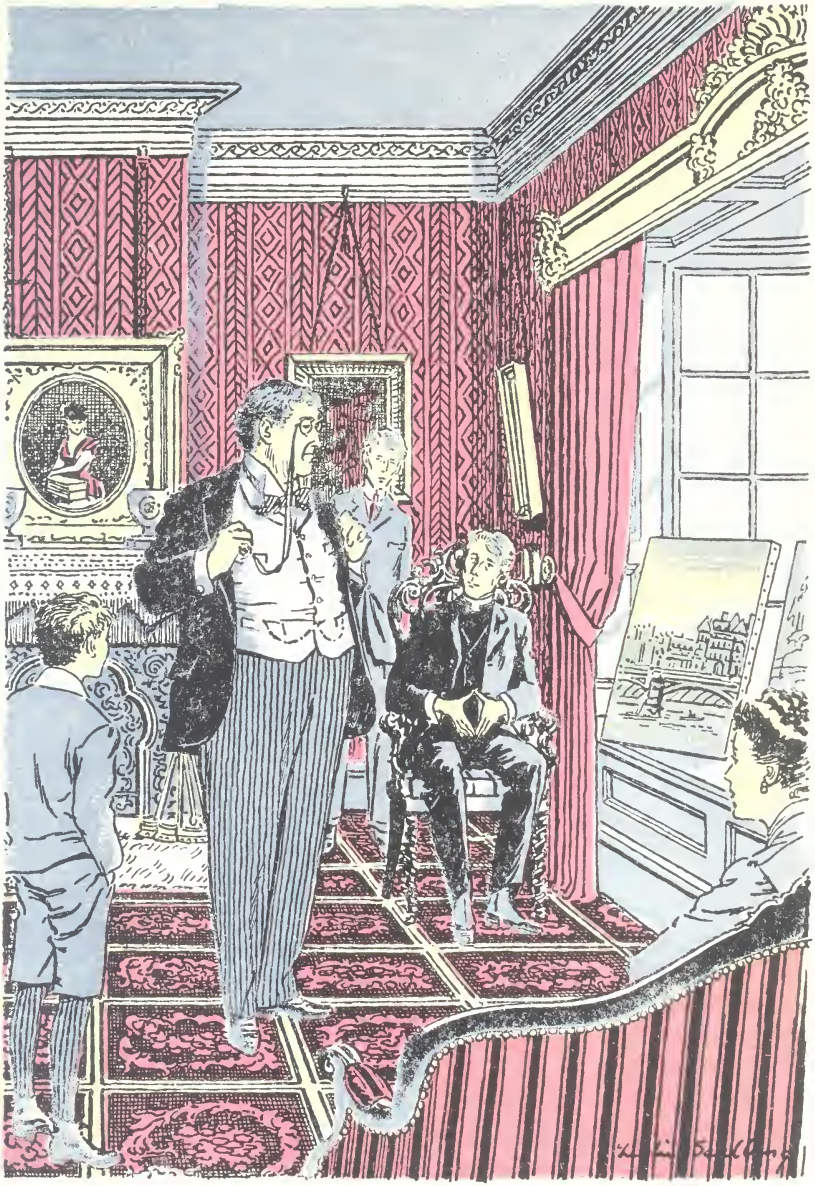
Mrs. Desmonde, for once tactful, said to Peters, "Let me give you more coffee."

"No, thank you. I am pressed for time. I have kept my cab waiting. Shall we proceed to the serious business of the day?"

"By all means." Bertram gave a sign to Davie, who left the room. Almost at once he returned, carrying the first picture, a view of the Seine at Passy, which he set up against a high-backed chair placed opposite the sofa.

Munsey Peters adjusted his pince-nez. He studied the painting intently, and at length made a gesture to Davie, who placed it by the window and brought in the next. For Stephen, standing in the background with a painfully thudding heart, it was an excruciating experience. He looked round the domestic circle — his father, seated stiffly erect with finger tips pressed together; Caroline, on a low stool by the sofa, a frown of concern furrowing her brow; his mother, dreamily comfortable on a love seat, perfectly detached, and Davie, eyes shining, full of confidence that his brother would be justified.

It was over at last, the final picture shown. Munsey Peters made a further survey of the paintings ranged against the oval sill of the bay window. Time and again, his eye came back to the bold contrasts and vivid colors of the canvas depicting the woman at her



clothesline. In the end he let fall his pince-nez and took his stance on the hearthrug.

Bertram drew a sharp breath. "Has my son any chance of becoming a painter of the first rank?"

"None."

There was a dead silence. The Rector bowed his head. Stephen, with the shadow of a smile, looked straight at Munsey Peters.

"I have gathered that you want the truth," Peters resumed. "These canvases have, perhaps, a certain crude vitality, but they completely ignore our great traditions of painting, traditions of propriety and restraint. Your son may wish to continue this as a hobby. But professionally . . . ah, my dear sir, painting is a cruel art. It has no place for failures."

Compassionately, Bertram stole a glance at his son as though expecting him to offer some defense. But Stephen kept silent.

"And now, if you will excuse me," said Peters, bowing.

The Rector got to his feet. "We are very grateful to you . . . even though your verdict has been unfavorable."

Again Munsey Peters bowed and, accompanied by the Rector, left the room. Presently came the sound of a wheezy vehicle.

To spare the others embarrassment, Stephen went outside. There, pacing up and down, bareheaded, was his father. Bertram took his son's arm sympathetically. "I have to go to the vestry. Will you walk with me?" As they went up the lane Bertram continued, "Stephen, that was painful for all of us. But it was imperative for me to know the truth. I hope you do not reproach me."

"Of course not."

They reached the church and, pausing in the chancel, outside the vestry door, Bertram rested his hand upon the effigy of the Crusader ancestor and faced his son.

"At least there is nothing now to prevent your returning to take orders. Your true place is here, Stephen."

"I'm afraid you don't understand. I am not giving up my painting. I have made up my mind to devote my life to art."

"But you've just had Peters' utterly damning opinion."

"That nonentity! The fact that he vilified my work was the highest compliment he could pay it."

"Are you mad?" Anger and dismay brought the blood to Bertram's brow. "To any normal person the evidence is plain. You must accept it."

"I have a right to my own life."

"Not if you are bent on ruining it. I have devoted to your education an amount of capital which I could barely afford. I had hoped all along that this step would be unnecessary. Nevertheless, for your own sake and mine I must bring you to your senses. Your allowance is stopped, as of this hour."

Stephen's gaze dwelt for a moment upon the stone effigy of his ancestor, who, in the half-light, seemed to smile cynically at him. He sighed. "Well, Father, that would appear to settle it."

For the remainder of the afternoon Stephen was a model of complaisance, heartening the others by his liveliness and good spirits. At six o'clock he insisted on driving with Davie to the train, sped him on his way with cheerful affection. Then, he went to the cab rank, where the taxi man had kept his bag, previously secreted among Davie's luggage. A train for the coast was due to leave in about an hour. He bought a ticket and set himself to wait.

Chapter Five

STEPHEN stood solitary in the bows of the Dover-Calais steamer, unmindful of the wind and rain, his thoughts balanced between bitterness and sadness. Presently, seating himself on an arm of a winch, unmindful of the sharp, cutting breeze, he took his sketchbook from his pocket. The movement was an outcry from the heart. He drew, with great rapidity, waves strange and ominous, seeing in their fretted contours, in their lashing crests, wild human faces and writhing torsos.

It was, perhaps, a kind of madness. He was shivering as the steamer at last edged warily into the arms of the Calais breakwater. On the Paris train, huddled in the corner of a drafty compartment, he shivered repeatedly, knew that he had caught a chill.

Peyrat, Glyn, even the Lamberts would still be absent from Paris. In desperation, Stephen went to Harry Chester's lodging.

Harry must owe him at least thirty pounds, a sum which now assumed significance since Stephen had only five pounds, nine shillings in his pocket. But Chester, too, was away. However, Stephen obtained from the concierge his forwarding address: the Hotel du Lion d'Or, Netiers, Normandy.

Encouraged, he sent off a telegram, explaining his situation and requesting Chester to wire at least part of the money in care of Alphonse Bisque, Peyrat's pastry-cook friend.

He put up for the night at a cheap hotel, and the next morning, feeling better, although with an aggravating cough, he made his way toward the patisserie. Monsieur Bisque received him cordially, his moon face wreathed in smiles, and produced, with the air of a conjurer, Chester's answering telegram. It conveyed no actual cash.

DELIGHTED HAVE YOUR WIRE. JOIN ME HERE. WEATHER AND HOTEL EXCELLENT. FINE PAINTING COUNTRY. BEST REGARDS. HARRY.

This friendly invitation brightened Stephen's eyes. He reclaimed his easel and stored equipment from Napoleon Campo, and purchased new tubes of color and fresh canvases. On these he made a down payment of fifty francs, promising Campo to remit the balance when he arrived at Netiers.

The express for Normandy, leaving from the Gare Montparnasse, was not crowded, and Stephen secured an empty compartment. His head was stuffy and he had a sharp stitch in his right side, but he lost his lassitude in watching the passing landscape: vast fields of yellow stubble flanked by long lines of poplars; teams of great horses dragging upon the plow; old farm buildings, ochertiled; a draggle of geese herded in slow procession by a barelegged girl with a hazel switch.

Toward three o'clock the train ran into the little station of Netiers. Stephen collected his things and jumped off. Chester was not on hand to meet him and he began to walk in the direction of the town. He passed a moated wall, entered crooked cobbled streets so narrow the sharp-pitched gray-stone houses seemed to meet above his head. Finally, in the heart of the market place, he

saw the gilded sign of the Lion d'Or. He made his way to the reception desk.

"My name is Desmonde. Will you be kind enough to let Mr. Chester know that I have arrived? He is expecting me."

The clerk studied Stephen for a moment, then said in chilly tones: "Monsieur Harry Chester *was* residing here, monsieur. Until this morning when we presented his bill. Since then we have not seen your famous Monsieur Chester."

Stephen gazed at the clerk, stupefied.

"Here is a letter your friend has left for you."

An envelope was tossed across the counter. It had been opened.

Dear Old Boy,

I thought we might make a go of it together but the bookkeeping department here got one step ahead of me. I'll probably bum my way South, stay in Nice for a while, try my luck at the tables. I shall certainly see you sooner or later. Frightfully sorry and all that — but needs must when the devil drives.

Yours,
Harry

The clerk was looking at him with unconcealed contempt. Stephen crushed the note between his fingers and swung round, out into the street.

Standing there, penniless, in this strange town, Stephen became disquietingly aware of how powerful was the weapon his father had used. Never before had he been without money. Nevertheless, with native obduracy, he set out to find temporary shelter.

Before the afternoon was far advanced he was installed in a little top room in a back courtyard at only twelve francs a week. As he had baggage, the landlady asked no advance but he resolved to raise the money to pay her before many hours had passed. His university training must surely fit him for some modest position. If only he felt less confoundedly seedy! But a fierce desire to prove himself sent him out again to the center of the town.

Most of the shops had that look of solid prosperity associated with a thriving agricultural district. Spades and hayforks, scythes,

a red-toothed harrow were ranged in the hardware store; there were petit fours and sugar almonds, contrived like bridal bouquets, in the window of a trim pastry shop; while in the corner creamery a great mound of Norman butter stood yellow on its china slab.

On an impulse, he entered the town hall and, selecting a clerk with a sympathetic air, sounded him out on the possibilities of employment in the town. The youth shook his head. "It is difficult . . . in a small place like this. The people are not amiable to strangers."

For an hour, Stephen combed the town without success. As night fell he returned, tired and discouraged, to his lodging. The sum of his resources was now one franc, fifteen sous.

Next day, he made a tour, on foot, of the neighboring farms. Altogether he must have tramped a distance of twenty kilometers. And in vain. At one farm he was given a nourishing hunk of pastry and a brimming bowl of milk. But there was no work for him.

That night as he tossed sleeplessly a frightful despondency fell upon him and, turning his face to the whitewashed wall, he cried like a child. The bout was over soon; but unluckily it had started off his cough. Throughout the night it troubled him severely. At last, toward dawn, he fell asleep.

It was late when he awoke. He got up, dressed without shaving and went into the town. He was walking aimlessly when he heard someone running after him. A hand was laid on his own. He started, and swung round. It was the clerk from the town hall.

"Excuse me, monsieur." The young man paused for breath. "I have been watching for you. I have made some inquiries on your behalf. And Madame Cruchot who with her husband keeps the grocery store there," he pointed across the street, "has two little daughters whom she wishes to be taught English. It is possible you might suit her."

"Thank you," Stephen stammered, overcome. "Thank you very much."

The young clerk smiled. "Good luck." He shook hands, raised his hat, and stood watching as Stephen hurried across the street.

The Cruchot grocery, with double plate-glass windows and a

glittering signboard, gave every indication of a prosperous establishment. A stream of customers passed in and out of the doorway, narrowed by hanging hams, nets of lemons and baskets of choice vegetables. Inside, presiding at a small desk, controlling the commotion, Stephen saw a yellow-haired woman in a mauve dress. She wore several rings and bangles, a large cameo brooch and heavy gold drop earrings.

"I beg your pardon," Stephen said. "My name is Desmonde. I understand you might require an English tutor for your children."

Madame Cruchot's eyes narrowed with cold appraisal. The young man before her looked "refined," and diffident enough to give no trouble.

"M'sieur can offer me some account of himself?"

Quite frankly, Stephen did so.

"So m'sieur has been a student of the college of Oxford." A gleam illuminated Madame's china-blue eyes but in the interests of bargaining was quickly concealed. "What salary would you require, m'sieur?"

Hurriedly Stephen tried to calculate the barest stipend which would support him. "Should we say thirty francs a week?"

With a gesture of dismay, Madame Cruchot raised her plump, ringed hands. Then she smiled, flashing a gold tooth at him like a bullet. "M'sieur amuses himself. We are far from rich, Monsieur Cruchot and I. The utmost my husband empowers me to offer is twenty francs."

"But, Madame . . . I am obliged to live."

Madame Cruchot shook her yellow chignon sadly.

"We too, m'sieur."

Stephen bit his lip, rage and pride swelling in his heart. The weekly rent of his room was twelve francs. How on earth could he keep himself on the eight francs that would remain? He half turned to leave. But Madame Cruchot leaned forward with an air of solicitude. "Perhaps if luncheon were provided, it might somewhat aid the situation?"

Abased beyond endurance, Stephen could not lift his eyes. He muttered: "Very well . . . I accept."

"Good. You will start tomorrow at eleven o'clock. And doubtless in future m'sieur will not neglect to shave."

Stephen inclined his head. He could not speak. Yet despite his humiliation, he could not but experience a sensation of relief. With twenty francs and a daily lunch, he was saved.

EVERY MORNING Stephen was awakened by the great bell of the cathedral which swung thrice at the elevation of the seven o'clock Mass, sending the pigeons flying over the empty cobbled square. In a nearby workmen's café he breakfasted for five sous on a cup of black coffee chased down by a tot of white wine, a combination amazing in its restorative power.

At eleven, Stephen presented himself at the Cruchot home, situated behind the shop. Here, in the trellised arbor or, on wet days, in the ornate salon, Stephen gave his attention to the little Cruchot girls: Victorine, aged eleven, and Marie-Louise, who was nine.

They were a trifle spoiled, but sometimes very sweet in their ways. Stephen did not find them difficult to manage and soon grew fond of them.

Monsieur Cruchot, a man of medium size, with darting coffee-colored eyes and a heavy, black, up-curled mustache, did not come often to the lessons. But Madame Cruchot came every day, upsetting the children and causing them to make mistakes.

In answer to her repeated demands Stephen taught the little girls the first stanza of *To a Skylark*. Then on a day appointed to demonstrate their progress, Madame appeared with three of her intimates, wives of prominent shopkeepers, who arranged themselves expectantly on the factory-gilt chairs of the salon.

Marie-Louise, chosen first for the test, got as far as *"Hail to thee, blithe spirit!"* then stopped, glanced round and suppressed a titter.

"Begin again, Marie-Louise," said Stephen kindly.

"Hail to thee, blithe spirit . . ." Again the child broke down, blinked, twisted her sash and glanced timidly at her mother.

"Go on," said Madame Cruchot in a strange voice.

Marie-Louise cast an imploring look at her teacher. A light sweat was breaking on Stephen's forehead.

Without warning, Madame Cruchot reached forward and slapped the child's cheek. Marie-Louise burst into tears.

In the moment of consternation which followed, a voice was heard calling loudly from the shop, "Come quickly, madame, the liver is here from the slaughterhouse."

Stephen stood helplessly, foreseeing with sardonic fatalism the possibility of his dismissal. But when her mother reappeared, Marie-Louise ran across the room, took hold of his hand and instantly recited the poem, completely. Victorine, not to be outdone, followed with a perfect performance.

Immediately there were cries of acclamation, smiles and nods were bestowed on Stephen, Madame Cruchot glowed with triumph. And after she had shown the ladies out she gave Stephen for lunch a plate of hot meat ragout, garnished with carrots and Bordeaux onions, instead of the usual thin slice of ham. Then, seating herself opposite him at the table, she remarked:

"My friends were much pleased with you. Madame Oulard — she is the wife of our first *pharmacien,* a lady of some position in the town, though naturally she cannot afford a tutor for her children — considers you *très sympathique."*

"I'm very grateful for her good opinion."

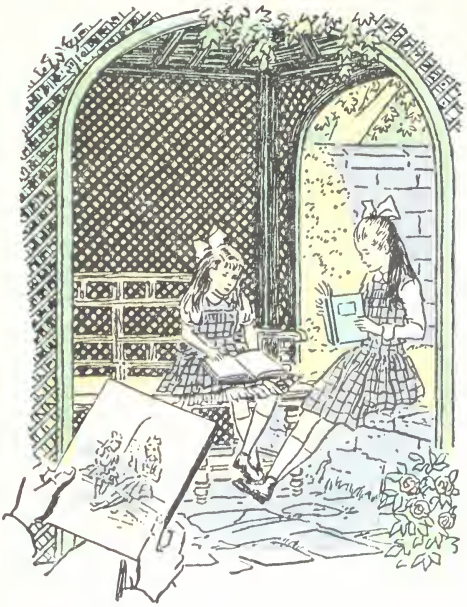
"Did you think her a pretty woman?"

"Good gracious, no," said Stephen, absently.

Madame Cruchot patted her pads of yellow hair. "Let me get you more ragout," she said.

In the following days the quality and the quantity of the English tutor's midday meal improved. Stephen, upon whom inadequate nutrition and that persistent cough had wrought considerable physical damage, began to feel stronger, and he experienced one day, for the first time since coming to Netiers, a burning desire to paint. On leaving for the grocery, he took with him a block of India paper and a handful of colored chalks. When the lesson was almost over he set the two children to reading in the arbor; then, with swift, sure, happy lines he made a pastel of them. The thing was done quickly, but never had he achieved anything so vivid, so fresh.

He heard a sound behind him: Madame Cruchot, over his shoul-



der, was gazing at the pastel. She saw her two children beautifully suggested in a few lines, a few shades of pure and brilliant color. She knew nothing of art. Yet her astute commercial instinct made her instantly aware that here was something of the highest quality. Immediately she coveted it. But beyond that, she experienced a singular and further quickening of her feeling for this strange young Englishman.

"I did not understand," she said with stunned incredulity, "that m'sieur was truly an artist, highly gifted."

"Perhaps you would care to have this?" Stephen said pleasantly.

The question, with its implication of purchase, made her withdraw slightly, but only for an instant. She answered: "Yes, M'sieur Stephen, and I shall speak of it to my husband. Of course, it is possible he will argue that the work was done in the hour of teaching, for which you are already paid, in which case — "

"My dear Madame Cruchot," Stephen broke in, "you misunderstand me. I offer you the picture as a gift."

Her eyes glistened, not from cupidity, but with a softer emotion. "I accept, M'sieur Stephen. I assure you that you will not regret it." With a sidelong glance, fleeting but intense, she rose, and made her way back to the shop.

After weeks of apathy, Stephen found that he could paint again. The little town with its drab inhabitants became suddenly a teeming source of inspiration. The canvases he had bought from Napoleon Campo were one by one transformed, stacked in the

corner of his attic bedroom. There were letters, too, from Peyrat and Glyn to cheer him.

In this state of resurrection, his mind was not wholly upon his teaching of the Cruchot children. And because of this abstraction he remained oblivious to the changes in Madame Cruchot's attitude toward him. The vast improvement in the cuisine and other marks of attention he put down to his employer's gratitude for the picture.

As he entered one day, however, she intercepted him in the passage.

"My friend," she exclaimed, gaily, "I have good news for you — a commission! Monsieur Cruchot insists that you must paint me."

Taken aback, Stephen stared at her in silence.

"But Madame," he said at last, seeking an excuse. "I . . . I do not undertake portraits. . . ."

She smiled at him reassuringly. "Do not worry, *mon petit*. I shall see that you are paid. On Thursday then, we shall begin." Before he could protest, she patted his arm and, with an arch backward glance, hurried away.

Thursday was the tradesmen's half-holiday. It was always quiet then since the shop closed down at noon. Yet, the moment Stephen arrived, he sensed in the shuttered establishment a preternatural stillness. Madame Cruchot received him at the door.

"No lesson today," she announced. "The little ones have gone to the country with the maid." She added, in an offhand manner, "My husband is at Rennes, for the market. We shall not be disturbed."

Talking volubly, she produced from the pantry a bottle of champagne. "Is this tête-à-tête not agreeable? Let me give you some champagne. It is the best we sell. Five francs the bottle."

He felt confused, baffled and uneasy, becoming more and more conscious of her languishing glances. He felt obliged to get the sitting under way and to make it as brief as possible.

"And now, madame, if you are agreeable, we may begin. Where shall you sit for me? In the salon?"

"No," she replied in an indistinct voice, "it is a better light up-

stairs." She rose. "I shall get ready now. Finish your wine. Then come up."

After waiting for five minutes he went upstairs. On the landing the door facing him was ajar. He imagined it gave access to a sitting room, but before he could knock she called to him: "Enter, *mon ami.*"

He went in. Madame Cruchot was standing by a double bed. She wore a peignoir and stood in a raffish pose, one hand on her hip. Then, with terrible coquetry, she came toward him.

A cold sweat broke over Stephen. He backed away, infuriated at himself for having fallen into such a situation. Without a word, he swung round and rushed from the house.

Chapter Six

NEXT MORNING Stephen packed his rucksack, roped his canvases together and departed from Netiers on foot. Toward five o'clock in the afternoon, a lorry stopped beside him and the driver, proud of this new means of transportation and his mastery of it, offered to take him to Paris. They drove all night and, as dawn broke, they crossed the Seine and entered the city.

Paris had a haggard air, yet as Stephen strode across the Pont Neuf he breathed the dank air deeply. He felt suffused by a hard determination to demonstrate his talent to the world.

He pawned his watch, a present from the Rector on his twenty-first birthday, for one hundred and eighty francs. Next, after a considerable search, he found a lodging near the Place St. Séverin. It was a poor quarter, frequented by artists, and a poorer room, but it had a good light and was cheap.

It was now past two, but without thought of food he selected four of his paintings and hurried to Napoleon Campo's shop. The colorman was seated on a box behind the counter, wearing a blue pilot coat and yellow knitted cap, his chapped ears protruding, purple cheeks unshaven.

"Well, Monsieur l'Abbé, what can I do for you?"

"First of all, let me give you the fifty francs I owe you."

"Good. You are an honest man."

"And now, Monsieur Campo, I want a large canvas, two hundred centimeters by eighty."

"So a great work is in prospect! Of course, you can pay?"

"Not money, Monsieur Campo. These paintings."

"Are you crazy, Abbé? My cellar is stuffed with paintings, rubbish that I took through the softness of my heart."

"Not all rubbish, Campo. You took paintings from Pissarro, and Degas."

"Are you a Degas, my little Abbé?"

"One day, perhaps."

"It is always the same fairy tale. You are to have fame and fortune overnight. Bah!"

"Then take twenty francs down and the paintings as a pledge against the balance."

Napoleon's pinpoint blue eyes searched the pale, serious face before him. He was not easily moved, but occasionally there had been in the manner of some needy aspirant, as there was in this Englishman, a quality of intensity which impressed him. Grumbling, he began to rummage in his shelves. When the canvas lay upon the counter, Stephen counted out the coins.

Napoleon Campo took snuff meditatively. "And now, naturally, you will starve."

Suddenly Campo pushed the coins back across the counter. "Return these to your offertory box, Abbé. And give me your wretched daubs."

Surprised, Stephen handed over his paintings. Without even a glance Napoleon thrust them under the counter.

"Don't you want to look at them? They are the best I've done."

"I am not a judge of paintings but of people," Campo retorted gruffly. "Good day, monsieur. And good fortune."

LATER Stephen set off for the bicycle shop in the Rue de Bièvre. He felt nervous, yet filled with an anticipation that made his heart beat fast. Often during the past months the recollection of those moments with Emmy Berthelot in the dark, narrow passage had come to him with a queer insistency.

He found her in the yard behind the workshop, oiling a red and gold bicycle. She accepted his greeting without surprise, then went on with her work. His pulse was absurdly uneven.

"That's a nice-looking machine," he said.

"I shall be using it soon." She straightened, thrust back a lock of hair. "Want to hire a wheel?"

He shook his head and took a quick breath. "Have you heard of the Prix de Luxembourg, Emmy? It's a competition open to all artists who've never been in the Salon. I mean to have a shot at it." As she turned away indifferently, he added, "I want you to sit for me."

Arrested, she stared at him. "Do my picture?"

"That's it."

He could see that her vanity was flattered. Then a thought struck her. "But I'm going on tour next month."

"That's time enough, if you come every day for three weeks."

"Well," she said, ungraciously, "I can't lose."

He suppressed an exclamation of satisfaction. She would be perfect for the subject which in these last few hours had taken command of him. He gave her his new address, asked her to be there at ten tomorrow, wearing her black sweater and pleated skirt.

Tramping back along the boulevard, Stephen realized suddenly that he had not eaten since he shared a sandwich with the driver of the *camion* on the previous evening. Hunger struck him like a blow. He bought a long loaf and a *tranche* of sausage. Strolling through the darkening street past the Jardin des Plantes, he bit alternately the crisp bread and the succulent *pâté*. How good it tasted. He felt happy, free, and strangely exalted.

On the next day, Emmy arrived some twenty minutes late.

"I thought you were never coming," he exclaimed.

She gazed round the wretched little room with its broken cane chair and sagging bed. Finally she looked at him, cruelly. "You're broke, aren't you?"

"Practically."

"You have a nerve. Getting me up to a hole like this."

He reddened. "It's not a bad place to paint in. Just give mé a chance and I promise you won't regret it."

With a shrug she permitted him to pose her by the window. Filled with a surge of power, he began to outline his conception. As the rules of the competition demanded a classical painting, his theme, though modern in composition, was to be allegorical: *Circe and Her Lovers.* In his imagination pleasure fought with virtue, and lust took the shape of prowling beasts. He felt the power to make his dream exist.

Although he could have gone on all day, he did not dare to keep her long, and toward noon suggested stopping. Immediately, she came to examine the preliminary sketch he had made. The sulky look left her face and as she saw herself occupying the center of the canvas, legs apart, hands planted on her hips, an attitude which was all her own. She said nothing as he helped her on with her coat but at the door she turned and nodded. "Same time tomorrow."

As the sittings progressed, he could no longer blind himself to the deepening of his feeling for Emmy. He reminded himself that it was not regard for him but vanity that brought her regularly to his room. When she was in an ill humor her responses came in monosyllables, and when he told her she might rest she would sprawl on her stomach on the bed, light a cigarette and immerse herself in a crumpled sports magazine.

But the legend from the *Odyssey,* the idea that Circe possessed the power to change men into the forms of animals, tickled her fancy.

"That'll teach them, for trying it on," she said.

The vulgarity made him wince. She was common, cheap and tough — unintelligent, unimaginative, callous. She knew nothing of art, and when he spoke of it was bored. Her small figure was exquisite and she had a gamin prettiness, but her expression was sullen. All her imperfections were apparent to him. Yet they made not the slightest difference to this strange emotion that grew within him. On the rare occasions when she was agreeable his heart lifted. If only he could take her out in the evening he felt that he might win her favor. But he was living on little more than half a franc a day, subsisting on a roll or an apple until six o'clock, then taking his solitary meal at the cheapest café in the district.

One afternoon she arrived later than usual, in excellent spirits. She was wearing a yellow fichu with a short red Zouave jacket, and her hair had been freshly washed.

"You're looking extremely nice," he said. "And I'd almost given you up."

"I had an appointment with Peroz. I got the contract I wanted. We leave the fourteenth of October."

"I shall miss you, Emmy." A sudden surge of longing overcame him. "Don't you realize that I've grown terribly fond of you?"

She laughed shortly and raised a warning finger.

"None of that, Abbé. It's not in our arrangement."

She laughed again and he noticed that her teeth were sharp and regular, with spaces in between. Vivaciously, as he began to paint, she described how she had got the better of Peroz in arranging the agreement.

"They say he's good-hearted," she concluded. "I think he's just a soft touch."

He encouraged her to go on talking about herself. Then, as the light failed, Stephen put down his brushes.

"Let me walk back with you," he said. "It's a lovely evening."

"Well," she shrugged. "If you like."

They went downstairs and presently came out to the Boulevard Gavranche. Couples were moving slowly, arm in arm, along the quiet pavements — the night seemed made for lovers. In a side street near the river they passed a café where, to the music of an accordion, people were dancing gaily in a little arbor, under Chinese lanterns hung from the branches of plane trees. He could feel her glancing toward him inquiringly.

"Don't you like to dance?"

With a slow flush of embarrassment, he shook his head. "I shouldn't be much good in there."

She gave her familiar shrug. "You're not good at much, are you?" she said.

They reached the cobbled shadows of the quays. As though bored by his silence, walking a little in advance, she had begun to hum the tune of the accordion.

"Wait, Emmy." He drew her into the shelter of an archway.

"What's on your mind, Abbé?"

"Can't you see how much you mean to me?"

He put his arms round her and held her close. For a few moments she permitted him to embrace her; then, with an abrupt movement of impatience, she pushed him away.

"You don't know the first thing about it." There was contempt in her voice.

Hurt and humiliated, he followed her down the street. Outside the bicycle shop she glanced at him as though nothing had happened. "Shall I come once more tomorrow?"

"No," he said bitterly. "It won't be necessary."

He turned away, hating her for her hardness, telling himself he would never see her again.

"Don't forget," she called after him, "I want to see it when it's done."

Next morning he threw himself passionately into the completion of the picture. So far, only the central figure had taken form. He went every forenoon to make studies at the Zoological Gardens; then, returning to his room, he transposed to the abject creatures he put upon the canvas something of his own sadness and subjection. At the end of that week his money ran out — searching for a coin to buy a roll, he could not find a single sou. He continued to paint with a kind of fury.

On the following day he felt weak and faint and realized that he would never finish the *Circe* unless he could find some means of sustenance. He selected three of his Netiers pictures that were especially bright and colorful, wrapped them in brown paper and, with the package under his arm, set out through the rain. It was an act of courage. He was resolved to offer his work to the best art dealer in France.

In the rosewood-paneled entrance hall of an imposing building on the Faubourg St. Honoré, Stephen found a young man in a cutaway coat, seated at a Louis XVI lacquer and ormolu desk. Through the portieres behind, a large salon was visible, hung with paintings, before which a number of fashionable people moved.

The sleek young man viewed Stephen with extreme wariness.

"Your business, monsieur?"

"A personal matter with Monsieur Tessier."

"I am afraid that Monsieur Tessier is not in the house. However, if you will take a chair I shall inquire."

As Stephen seated himself a side door opened, and three persons came out — a woman, very chic, carrying a miniature poodle, fantastically clipped; her escort, an elderly man, bored and distinguished; and Tessier, whom Stephen recognized at once, a suave figure, with a protruding lower lip and dark, hooded eyes. The dealer was talking.

"I assure you, it is a perfect gem of the Barbizon school. The finest Millet which has come my way in several years."

"It is lovely," said the lady.

"But one hundred thousand francs!" her companion interpolated.

"If you do not wish me to reserve it for you, you have only to let me know. Virtually, I am committed to another client."

There was a touch on the escort's sleeve, a murmur of intimate conversation, then: "You may consider the picture sold."

Gravely approving such good taste, Tessier conducted them to the door, and when he turned Stephen stood up. "Monsieur Tessier, will you give me five minutes of your time?"

The dealer looked up sharply, taking in the shabby figure, from the mud-splashed shoes to the bundle beneath the arm.

"No," he murmured. "Not now."

"But, monsieur," Stephen persisted, "I ask you only to view my work. It is as fine as anything from Barbizon."

Tessier's lip drew back. "Every week I am besieged by self-styled geniuses who imagine I will swoon with ecstasy when I behold their execrable efforts. But never has one had the effrontery to approach me here, at the opening of my autumn exhibition."

"I am sorry, but the matter is urgent."

"Another time, I beg of you," Tessier said in a fatigued manner. He entered the salon and was lost to view.

Stephen, who had begun to undo the package, moved toward the door. As he came into the wet street, the string slipped from his grasp, and the three canvases slid into the gutter. He picked them

up, carefully. The mere act of stooping made his head swim. He told himself that there were other dealers in Paris, less arrogant than Tessier. Slowly he started across the street.

Two hours later, wet through and still encumbered with the paintings, he was back at the Place St. Séverin, so exhausted he could barely climb to his room. As he did so, the door on the half landing swung open and there appeared, dressed in sabots and a threadbare black overcoat, a thin, sallow man of about thirty, with sunken eyes. He studied Stephen with a peculiar, bitter smile.

"No luck?" he exclaimed.

"No."

"Whom did you try?"

"Most of them . . . from Tessier down. I had one offer. Two hundred francs to fake a Breughel."

"Ah! Life has its little vexations. What's your name?"

"Desmonde."

"I am Amédée Modigliani. Come in and have a drink."

He threw open the door of his room, identical almost with Stephen's, but perhaps more squalid. Beside the unmade bed stood a stack of empty bottles and in the center an easel bearing a large painting of a reclining nude.

"You like it?" Pouring two Pernods from a bottle, Modigliani inclined his head toward the canvas.

"Yes," Stephen said, after a moment.

"Good. But the police commissioner has proclaimed that my nudes are scandalous, and no one is buying. Were it not for my talent as a dishwasher at the Hotel Monarque, I should have obliged my critics and ceased to exist. Would you care to try the job? I am going there now."

"I'll try anything," Stephen said.

They went out together. The Grand Monarque, one of the most famous Parisian hotels, was a palatial building occupying an entire square. A bevy of liveried attendants hovered behind the polished brass doors, alert to receive its distinguished visitors. Modigliani, however, led the way round the corner and through a dark alley to a steep flight of steps which admitted them to a huge, feebly

illuminated cellar. Its ceiling was crossed by a maze of dripping iron pipes, the walls were scaling, the broken stone floor was covered with slops. At a long stand of steaming wood tubs, a row of men, assembled, it seemed, from the slums of Paris, were feverishly washing dishes, which a relay of scullions kept rushing in from the adjoining kitchens.

Amédée approached the foreman, who handed Stephen a metal disk stamped with a number, and chalked a time opposite that number on the slate that hung above his cubicle. Imitating his companion, Stephen stripped off his jacket and, taking his place in the line, began to wash the dinner plates piled above the sink. The smell of the scummy water, foul with grease and remnants of food, was nauseating. It was strange to hear faint wafts of polite music coming from the orchestra in the palm court overhead.

Shortly before midnight there was a lull. Amédée put on his coat, and with a motion of his head drew Stephen toward the door, where the foreman paid each of them two francs fifty.

Outside, Amédée slouched off through the darkened streets and led the way into an all-night bistro. Here, he drank several Pernods while Stephen consumed a large bowl of *pot-au-feu,* thick with good vegetables and shredded pieces of mutton. It was his first satisfying meal in several days.

"Don't you want anything?" he asked.

Amédée gazed at the opalescent fluid in the glass which he held in his nicotine-stained fingers. "This is meat and drink to me."

Seated there in the deserted café, the billiard table in the rear shrouded for the night, the solitary waiter half asleep with his serviette over his head, Amédée revealed something of himself.

Born in Italy, of a family of Jewish bankers, he had studied, despite illness, in Florence and in Venice. For the past seven years, inspired by the primitives and Negro art, he had worked in Paris, sometimes with his friend Picasso, and occasionally with Gris. He had sold practically nothing. "So now," he concluded, "you see me, enfeebled by poverty, alcohol and pernicious drugs. Alone, except for a young girl who has the misfortune to be devoted to me. Devoid of all reputation. But rejoicing in the fact that I have never debased my art."

THIS strange encounter was a providential one for Stephen. Now, by enduring five hours of labor every night at the Grand Monarque he was able to continue to work upon the *Circe.*

At last, some three weeks later, it was finished. There she stood, in careless insolence, this modern temptress, her background not a classic isle but a Paris slum street. And grouped about her were the broken, servile, longing beasts.

In nervous haste, Stephen wrapped the painting and carried it all the way to the Institut des Arts Graphiques. Here an aged official took his name, then, discovering that the canvas was unframed, became reluctant to accept it.

Stephen, glimpsing a long gallery stacked with scores of submitted paintings, experienced a sudden apathy.

"I cannot afford a frame. Take it as it is, or not at all."

The official threw up his hands.

"It is most irregular, monsieur. But leave it if you wish."

Back in his attic Stephen sat down, supporting his head with his hands. What was he to do? Impossible to continue washing dishes, his soul revolted at the thought; yet, except for his clothes, his painting equipment and fifteen sous, he was destitute.

But this was nothing compared to the insupportable sense of loneliness and deprivation that racked him. No longer dulled by the anodyne of work, his longing for Emmy returned, stronger than ever. He blamed himself for not having asked her to view the painting. And in a few days she would be gone, moving south to the sunny Côte d'Azur with the Peroz troupe.

Suddenly, out of the blue, an idea came to him. Snatching his hat, he hurried from the room and set off shakily in the direction of the Boulevard Jules Ferry.

Chapter Seven

OUTSIDE the city of Angers, on the river Loire, under a brilliant October sky the Cirque Peroz, ringed by bright red caravans, had raised its canvas city. Already the side shows were in action, the barkers had begun their exhortations.

At his stand in the line of booths, dressed in a blue blouse, beret and loose black tie, Stephen took a long breath of the country air, aromatic with wood smoke, tanbark and the scent of horses. He did not regret the impulse that had taken him to Peroz six weeks ago. He was almost happy. Beside him stood an ornate easel bearing a sign that extolled him as the Great Artist of London and Paris and promised an exact likeness, in high-grade charcoal for five francs; in rich and permanent colors, seven francs fifty, courtesy and service as afforded to the crowned heads of Europe, satisfaction guaranteed.

"Walk up, walk up. Come, sir, won't you persuade mademoiselle to have her pretty face drawn? Make a record for your grandchildren."

A country couple, arm in arm, wearing their Sunday clothes lingered before him. Blushing, the young woman came forward. With a few swift strokes he drew a pleasant likeness, brought out the fine lacework on her coif, and, taught by experience, did not forget her cameo brooch, a family treasure.

Meanwhile a small crowd had collected, there were murmurs of approval for the finished portrait, and soon he was hard at work. At six o'clock the crowd thinned, as it always did before the main performance of the circus. Taking down his sign, Stephen went through ropes and canvas to a small enclosure behind the adjoining booth. Here, crouched at a glowing brazier, a shriveled little man in cracked leggings and soiled corduroy breeches was cooking supper.

"What have we tonight, Jo-jo?"

"The usual. Also some fresh Angers pork sausage which I picked up." Jo-jo, who in his youth had been a jockey, then stableman, then bookies' tout, was an expert forager.

"I like these two-night stands." Stephen made room on the brazier for a tin coffee percolator. "We're free tomorrow until three. Emmy and I mean to have a look at the river."

As he spoke the flap of the booth opened and a strange-looking man in check trousers and a khaki turtle-neck sweater came out. His face and hands were covered with a thick crust of coppery scales. This was Jean Baptiste, who shared a caravan with Stephen

and Jo-jo. Mild and well educated, he was an extreme case of chronic psoriasis, a painless yet incurable and gruesome condition of the skin which had broken up his marriage and lost him his position. Now, by exposing himself to the curious as the Human Alligator, he made a modest livelihood.

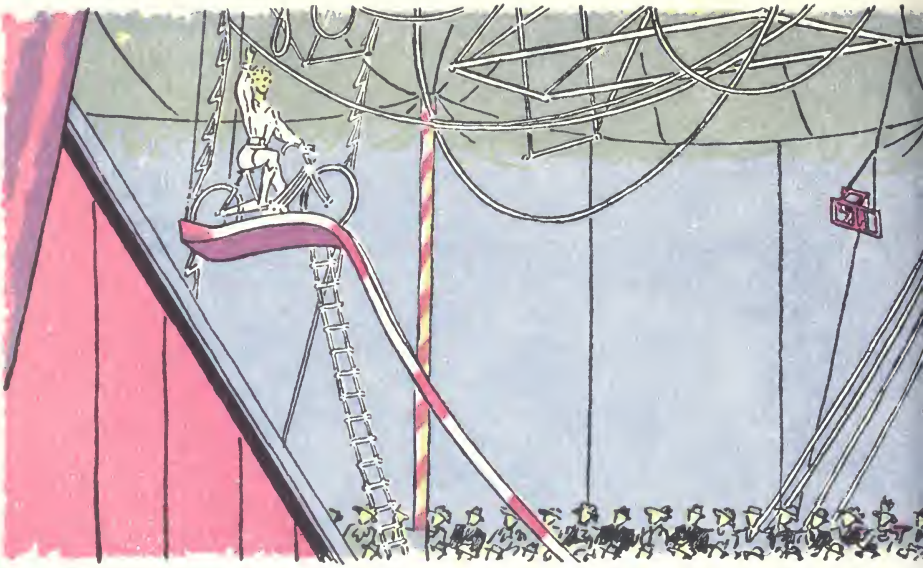
When the meal was ready they shared it, sitting round the glowing charcoal — a big pot of steaming soup followed by the sausages, spicy with country herbs, the gravy sopped up with hunks of fresh bread, then coffee, hot and strong, a bottle of the local liqueur.

It was Stephen's turn to wash up. When he had finished, lights were glowing like fireflies over the fairground. He had not seen Emmy all day, but she did not like to be disturbed just before the show and people were already converging toward the big tent. He crossed to the back entrance of the arena where it was his duty to join the staff that showed patrons to their seats, dispensed programs, ices, lemonade and nougat.

Tier upon tier of expectant faces rose up from the sawdust ring. On its raised platform, draped with red and gold, the brass band struck into the Grand March, the ringmaster, Peroz himself, appeared in top hat, white cords and scarlet coat, a procession of cream ponies cantered with tossing manes into the arena and the performance began.

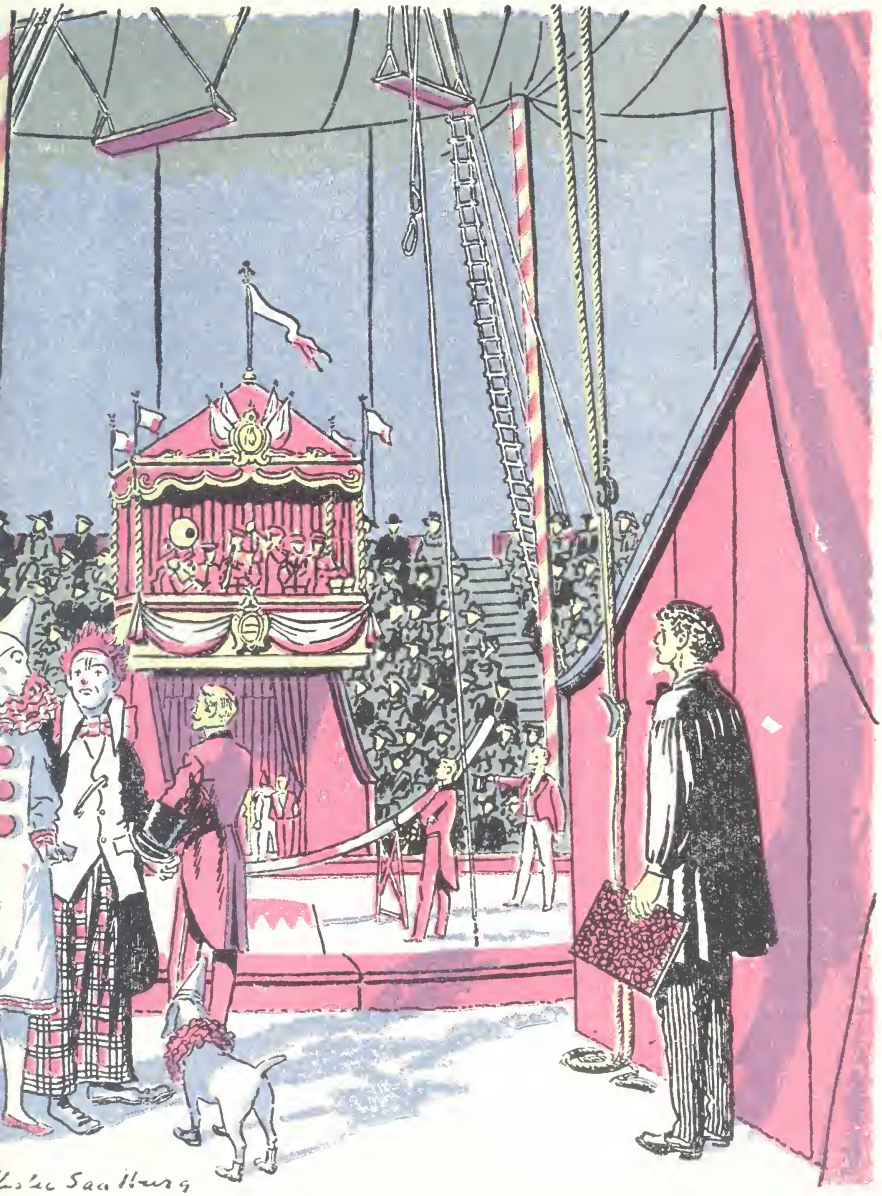
It was fascinating, this new world Stephen had discovered, with its superb, high-stepping horses, ponderous elephants and yellow-eyed lions, its acrobats, jugglers and swaying tightrope walkers. Crouched in a corner with a sketchbook on his knee he drew and drew. This was his real work, and already in the portfolio in his locker he had scores of studies which he would use in one tremendous composition.

After the intermission, when the more important performers made their appearance, a wooden floor was swiftly assembled in the ring and there came that fanfare which always caused his heart to beat fast. Then Emmy cycled in, wearing a white satin blouse, white shorts and long white boots. She began to execute upon the light nickel-plated machine a series of evolutions that left the spectator dizzy, circling and turning within the confined space of the flooring, altering her position until she rode upside



down beneath the handle bars, finally dismembering the machine while in motion and completing the complex pattern upon a single wheel. A burst of applause was followed by a silence as Emmy walked toward the far end of the arena where a high metal chute, painted red, white and blue, descended almost vertically from the roof of the tent and ended in an abrupt up-curve some feet short of the wooden floor.

By altering its tempo the band exaggerated the suspense as Emmy, slowly climbing the rope ladder, reached the minute platform at the top of the chute. There, she unhooked a heavier cycle from its cleats, tested the frames, stretched her limbs, dusted her hands with chalk. Finally, mounting the machine on the platform, she seemed for a long moment to be suspended. The brass, which had gradually muted to a prophetic murmur, now came to life, supported by the drums, which rolled and reverberated, louder, louder. It was the instant which made Stephen wish to close his eyes. Jo-jo had told him that the danger was limited, yet the white central strip down which the wheels must travel had less than a six-inch span and when the humidity was high the slippery surface



was treacherous. However, there was no time to think — in a final thunder of sound Emmy let herself go, dropped like a plummet, shot up the curve, flew through the air for thirty feet and landed on the wooden flooring with a velocity that carried her out of the tent like a flash.

Under cover of the applause, Stephen went round to the dressing tent. He had to wait fifteen minutes before she came out. She was not in the most amiable temper. "The chute was damp, and these lazy rascals hadn't wiped it. I almost didn't go down." On several such occasions, she had called the act off. Now, however, the complaint left her voice. "I wanted to tonight though, because of these military fellows. Did you see that group of officers in the front box?"

"I'm afraid not."

"A smart lot. I like a uniform. And were they trying to get off with me! Not that I took notice. Still, I did put in a little extra for their benefit."

He bit his lip, trying to stifle his jealousy.

"Let's walk by the town walls," he said. "It's such a lovely night. Look, the moon's just coming out."

"And I am just going in."

"I haven't seen you all day. Do come."

"Haven't I told you I am always fatigued after my act? All very well for you, selling programs and nougat."

He concealed his disappointment stoically, and walked with her to the caravan which she shared with Madame Armande, the costume woman. He had been hungry for Emmy's company all day. As she stood there, seductive in the moonlight, he wanted to seize her roughly and force his kisses on her. Instead he said:

"Don't forget about the river tomorrow. I'll be here at ten."

He watched her run up the steps and disappear into the caravan. Then, restless and unsettled, he set out for the ramparts alone.

On the following morning Emmy surprised and cheered him by being ready when he called, and shortly they were on their bicycles, bound for the Loire. As usual, she set a very fast pace, with the fixed purpose of outdistancing him. His machine, bought cheap

with his first week's pay, was an old model; however, he maintained his place just behind her shoulder.

They swung through a wood and all at once the splendor of the valley was revealed — the broad, glinting river, moving lazily over shallows of golden sand, past little green islands and moored flat-bottomed boats. Behind a screen of beeches, Stephen glimpsed the lichened, gray façade and pointed turrets of an old château. The beauty of the countryside intoxicated him. Uplifted, he made as though to speak to Emmy, then, wisely, refrained.

Toward noon they drew up at a riverside inn where, above the doorway, a monstrous fish, swathed in weeds, swam in a glass case. The inn was empty of customers, which did not displease Stephen, who suffered from the too open admiration which his companion provoked at the more sporting cafés which she preferred. They sat down at a scrubbed table by a window hung with ivy and ordered a dish of tiny crisp Loire sprats which the landlady strongly recommended to them. With this came French fried potatoes and the beer that Emmy favored.

For once she was in an excellent humor.

"You'll never guess what I got this morning. Roses. And in them a billet-doux from one of the officers."

"Indeed." His expression had turned slightly rigid.

"Here it is. Monogram and all." She felt in her pocket and brought out a crumpled sheet. "Take a look."

He glanced at it, noting the double meaning in the polite phrases inviting her to supper. He handed it back without comment.

"He's a captain. Tall and good-looking, with a mustache."

"Shall you go?" he asked in an expressionless tone.

"How can I, with the move to Tours tonight?"

"But the captain?" he persisted. "And with a mustache."

The irony of his manner pierced her self-esteem and a faint flush showed under her bluish-white skin. "What do you think I am? I know these Army types. Not for me, thanks."

He paid the bill and they went down to the water's edge. The sun, reflecting upward from the stream in glittering shafts, enveloped them in light. And while she lit a cigarette and relaxed beneath a shady willow, he began to sketch her. Already he had

made scores of drawings reflecting his feeling for her, that complex interplay of anguish, desire, and at times near hatred. He was not blind to her selfishness, cruelty and vanity. He knew that she merely tolerated him because his unconcealed desire gave her a sense of power. Yet he longed for her with a physical need which increased from day to day.

Presently, glancing up from his sketchbook, he saw that she was asleep. He sighed irritably; then, on an impulse, went farther down the bank, threw off his clothes and plunged into the river. The shock of the spring-fed stream was an invigorating delight. When he had dressed, he returned. She was standing up, shaking the dried grass from her short bushy hair.

"What time is it?"

"Still early." He came close and put his arm round her waist. "We have another hour."

"Oh, leave me." She pushed her hands against his chest.

"But Emmy . . ."

"No, no. We mustn't be late. You don't want to lose your job."

Her unusual concern for his welfare puzzled him. Nor was this dispelled by her sprightly manner as they rode back to Angers. In a high voice she sang snatches of the latest music-hall air. And, following her habit when she was gay, she left the inhabitants of the riverside villages gaping by a display of trick riding.

When they reached the circus it was not yet three, but Stephen put up his easel. All the afternoon he worked moodily, struggling against the thought that she had cut short their expedition in order to keep an assignation with the officer. During supper he spoke scarcely a word to Jo-Jo and the Croc. At last, he got up abruptly and made his way to Emmy's caravan.

Madame Armande was seated on the steps with a bucket between her fat knees, washing stockings. At one time she had been in a trapeze act but a bad fall had broken her hip. Now, at fifty, heavy and shapeless, she was the company gossip.

"Good evening," Stephen said. "Is Emmy in?"

"Abbé, you understand very well that she sees no one before the show. I would not dare disturb her."

He hesitated, anxious to believe her. "She's resting?"

"What else! *Nom de Dieu,* do you make me a liar?"

Was her indignation real? He forced himself to turn away.

The crowds flocked in, the show began, roars of laughter and applause filled the big tent. Emmy was late in coming on. When she finally appeared it seemed to his overstrung fancy that her performance was more dashing than usual. Prolonged shouts of "Bravo" followed her as she made her exit.

Afterward, in the bustle and confusion of lifting stakes with the others, he could not see her. A cold wind whipped across the ground. All around, by the red light of flares, men toiled like demons, hauling on ropes, struggling with the great bights of flapping canvas. The animals gave out weird howls of protest. The traction engines, pounding and snorting, added to the tumult. To Stephen it seemed that the scene came straight from the *Inferno* and that he, too, was suffering the tortures of the damned.

THE CIRQUE PEROZ swung southeast into the Côte d'Or, making one-night stands in the old, stone-walled towns, strung out between sloping vineyards, along the valley of the Ouche.

Stephen had at first been viewed by the company with reserve. But the weekly "take" from his portraiture was satisfactory and since a percentage of this sum went into the *tronc,* in which all the troupe would share eventually, he was considered to be pulling his weight.

The troupe were a human lot. Fernand, the lion tamer, who strode fearlessly into the circular iron cage in his blue and silver uniform, with a sleeve dramatically slashed to ribbons, was the most timorous of men, who suffered from nervous dyspepsia and was coddled on a milk diet by his devoted wife. The aged lions were harmless as cows, and roared only because they wanted their supper. "We have not had an accident in twenty years," Peroz would remark complacently, as he sent out advance notices to the local paper of the next town on the circuit:

NARROW ESCAPE AT THE CIRQUE PEROZ

LIONESS RUNS AMUCK

Fernand severely mauled

Max and Montz, both dwarfs, were the two principal clowns. Their feature act was "The Elopement," a sketch carried out with an antique Panhard motorcar that finally fell apart. Max, who played the part of an elderly bride, left the audience helpless from laughter. Yet out of the arena he manifested a profound melancholy and confided to Stephen a frustrated passion for the violin.

The Japanese juggler was a devout Christian Scientist; Nina d'Amora, who rode bareback, was allergic to horses; while Philippe, who every night took spectacular risks on the high trapeze, spent most of his spare time knitting socks.

Stephen saw more of Jo-jo and the Croc than any of the others, but it was for Jo-jo that he entertained a particular regard. The ex-jockey was a rogue, yet never in his life had he let down a friend. Often in the evening, when Stephen came into the caravan after seeing Emmy, he caught Jo-jo's gaze, fixed upon him with a sort of cynical understanding. Upon such occasions the ex-jockey turned to Jean Baptiste and started a deliberately gross discussion about women.

Stephen knew that the dialogue was directed at him, intended as a remedy. Yet his malady had progressed so far it seemed incurable, intensified by Emmy's inconsistencies. Sometimes she treated him well and when they strolled together in the darkness permitted him to kiss her before quickly drawing away. He hung about her like a wasp around a nectarine.

One wet afternoon the circus pulled into the small community of Moulin-les-Drages. No advance bills had been posted. The town proved to be mean and poverty-stricken, and the rain steadily increased. When late afternoon came not more than a hundred people were assembled in the dripping tent.

Twice during Emmy's preliminary routine her wheel skidded, spilling her onto the damp flooring. The mishaps evoked catcalls from the boorish audience. As a result, Emmy cut the main part of her act and rode from the ring with her head in the air.

When Stephen saw her afterward outside the tent she was pale with mortification. Silently, he moved off with her along the road toward the common, where the caravans were parked. They had

not proceeded far when a heavy shower broke, forcing them to run for shelter to a barn that stood in an open field.

"At least it's dry here," Stephen said. Then he added: "I'm glad you didn't go down the chute tonight. That crowd didn't deserve it. They seemed an unsympathetic lot."

"I didn't notice it. I always hold my audience."

"Then why didn't you go down?"

"Because the chute was sopping wet." In a spasm of temper, her eyes sparked at him in the semidarkness. "Don't you know the risks I take every night, while you sit safe on your backside, scratching on a sheet of paper, with no more guts than a louse?"

Infuriated, he caught her round the waist. "Don't speak to me like that."

"Let me go."

"Not till you apologize."

The next instant they were struggling together. Stephen was blind with anger, but she fought like a wildcat, twisting and turning with feline suppleness. They swayed to and fro until, crooking her leg behind his, she threw him heavily.

"There," she gasped. "Let that be a lesson to you."

He got up slowly and saw, with confused surprise, that she was leaning back in the hay, watching him through narrowed eyes with an odd, speculative expression. On her face, usually of a cold pallor, there was a tinge of color, on her pale lips a curious smile. She said suddenly: "Well, stupid . . . what are you waiting for?"

It was so blatant, so devoid of affection, that he did not stir. Frozen and repelled, he stared at her, then spun round and walked away. She could not believe it. Affronted and enraged, she jumped to her feet.

"Softy!" she called after him. *"Espèce de crétin!"*

Desire surged in him again. He turned back. "Emmy..."

But now she was hard as stone.

"Go to the devil," she spat at him.

He felt he had reached the lowest level of abasement. He turned away again, going straight ahead, heedlessly. At last he found himself back on the circus ground. They were not leaving till the next day and the great tent still stood, empty and deserted. Some-

thing drove him inside. The moon had come out after the rain and was shining through the top aperture in the canopy, revealing the chute, which glistened with moisture. A strange impulse took shape in his tormented mind. He walked toward the rope ladder, took hold of it, began slowly to climb.

Now he was at the top, edging onto the platform. The height of the tiny perch made him so dizzy he closed his eyes and clung to the metal support. But he compelled his rigid muscles into action. Shakily, he unhooked the bicycle from its cleats, aligned the wheels and mounted. Then, his arm hooked firmly to the pole, he forced himself to look down.

The ring beneath him was a distant yellow disk. The chute, over which he was poised, seemed no wider than a ribbon. He was still holding on; he could go back. Fear petrified him. He fought it.

He took a deep breath, crouched forward, vaguely conscious of a shout, of a dark foreshortened figure waving from below. Focusing his gaze on the central white strip, he let go. There came a split second of flying descent, an upward surge through the air, then with a resounding bounce he was down, spilling out into the field outside. He lay there, surprised to be alive. Then he heard someone running toward him.

"Nom de Dieu . . . do you try to kill yourself?" It was Jo-jo.

"No," said Stephen, getting up giddily. "But what difference would it have made?"

Jo-jo stared at him. "Come and have a drink."

They went across to the village café. After a glass of Calvados, Stephen's hand stopped shaking. But he realized he had accomplished nothing. He could not break with her. The pain in his heart was still there.

Chapter Eight

Two weeks later the circus reached Nice. The glittering sea front with its ostentatious hotels seemed disagreeably pretentious. But the circus ground was inland, surrounded by narrow streets filled with little flower and fruit stalls which had

the intimate charm of Paris and the added warmth of the south.

One afternoon, standing at his easel in the fairground completing a final portrait, Stephen became conscious of a spectator at his elbow. He glanced round.

"Chester!"

"How are you, old boy?" Harry broke into his infectious laugh and held out his hand. "And where on earth did you get that frightful rig-out?"

"It goes with the job."

"That's one way to attract the natives. But it must make you feel a bit of an ass."

Chester was fashionably dressed. His face was deeply tanned.

"You look well," Stephen said, delivering the portrait. "I gather you've had some luck at the tables."

"To put it mildly, yes." Chester grinned. "I was down to my uppers and bet my last fifty francs on double zero. When it came up I kept betting on it with everything left on. Double zero came up three times. You never saw such a pile of lovely big red counters. The third time I picked everything up quick and scooted to the cashier's desk. I've been living like a lord ever since." He took Stephen's arm. "Now tell me about yourself. How's the work going?"

"Only so-so."

"Let's have a look."

Stephen led the way to his caravan, brought out a few of his canvases and stood them one by one against the hub cap.

"Well, old boy," Harry declared at last, "you may have something, but I can't quite get it. Isn't your brushwork pretty rough?"

"It's meant to be rough . . . to convey an impression of life."

"These horses aren't particularly lifelike. I like a horse to look like a horse."

Stephen realized that Chester had not the least idea what he was driving at. "Are you still painting?"

"In my spare time. I go out with Lambert occasionally. Elise and he are here. He's got hold of a rich American widow and is doing a full-length of her."

As he spoke, Emmy appeared from behind the caravan. When she saw Chester a queer look came over her face.

"What are you doing here?" she said.

"I usually turn up when least expected."

"Like a bad centime?"

"This time like a good thousand-franc note," Chester answered amiably. "Now don't be rude to Uncle Harry. You know his nerves are weak." He looked at his watch. "I'm due at the Negresco at six. But I want you both to come tomorrow for luncheon at my apartment, 11-B Rue des Lilas. You're both free? Good. The tramway goes past my door." With a smile and a wave of his cane he hailed a cab and jumped in.

On the following day, when Emmy met Stephen, she was wearing a light-yellow dress of embroidered muslin and a ribbon of the same color round her short bushy hair. She gave him her little tight-lipped smile. "How do I look?"

"Wonderful."

"I bought this frock this morning. I like to show that Chester that I am not something beneath his feet."

"Oh, Harry's not a bad sort. He can't help being a bit spoiled. A lot of silly women have fallen for his blue eyes."

"At least I'm not one of them."

"No. I'm really rather relieved that you dislike him." He pressed her hand — she let him hold it for a moment.

CHESTER's pleasant apartment in the Rue des Lilas opened upon a balcony around a courtyard where a fountain trickled and oleanders flowered in green tubs.

He greeted them effusively. "Welcome to the ancestral château. It's not large, but it has a history."

"A bad one, no doubt," said Emmy.

Chester laughed. He was wearing white flannel trousers and a blue blazer with brass buttons. His thick brown hair had a lighter streak running back from his brow.

While he took Emmy to the bedroom to leave her scarf and gloves, Stephen glanced round the small living room. On the walls were two framed water colors which he recognized as Lambert's work. As Stephen gazed at them, he wondered how he could ever have been taken in by such mere prettiness. They were devoid of

vitality, utterly meaningless. They made him realize how long a road he had traveled since those first days in Paris.

"Good, aren't they?" Chester had returned with Emmy. "How about a drink?" He poured out three glasses of Dubonnet just as the bell rang and the Lamberts came in.

Philip, who had grown stouter, more languid in his manner, wore a gray suit with a pink carnation in his buttonhole. He stretched out on the divan, and delicately put his thin nostrils to the flower in his lapel. "Now tell me everything, dear boy."

Stephen began a brief account of himself but before he had gone far he saw that Lambert was not attending.

"You know, Desmonde," Philip's tone was amused, "you can't attack art with a pickax. Do as I do and use a little delicacy, a little skill. I never overwork myself yet I never want for a client."

Chester's announcement that luncheon was ready saved Stephen from a reply. The meal sent up from a hotel nearby was admirable and, early on, Harry had popped the cork from a bottle of Veuve Clicquot. But the gayer the party became, the more Stephen felt out of it. He no longer belonged in this society. Lambert, whom he had once admired, he now saw as a poseur and dilettante; Elise as a complaisant partner in the game of artistic bluff.

After coffee, they sat out upon the balcony. Continuing to monopolize the conversation, Lambert described the facial and social deficiencies of the elderly woman he was at present painting.

"I imagine her check was good," Stephen said stiffly.

Lambert looked pained. Taking advantage of the lull in the conversation Stephen looked at Emmy. "I'm afraid we must go now."

"Oh, nonsense," Chester protested. "The afternoon's young."

"If I don't I shall be late for my job."

"Then why don't you stay, Emmy? I'll take you back later."

She hesitated, then shook her head. "No. I'll go now."

Downstairs, they got into a cab. Stephen leaned toward her. "It was good of you to come away with me."

"I don't care to make myself cheap."

It was not the answer he had hoped for; nevertheless, he drew closer to her and sought her hand. But she pushed him away pettishly.

The Cirque Peroz found it agreeable to be settled in their winter quarters on the Côte d'Azur. The schedule had been reduced to five performances a week and Monday and Tuesday were free.

Stephen, settled in the new routine, had begun the design for a painting wherein he meant to utilize the individual studies made in the big tent, and which he proposed to name *Circus*.

Since the day of the luncheon, the barometer of Emmy's moods had turned fair. They had seen nothing more of Chester or the Lamberts, and Stephen was gratified that she should accept the abrupt severance of this friendship with so little concern. She had found an interest in Lunel, near Nice, where Madame Armande's sister kept a small millinery establishment. Emmy, like most French girls, had a talent for the needle, and every afternoon she went off in the tramcar, to earn some pin money in the workroom of "The Straw Hat." As a result Stephen saw even less of her than usual. Yet he derived comfort from this unexpectedly sedate aspect of her nature, though he told himself such work must be dull for her. He discovered that a touring operatic company was giving a performance of *La Bohème* on the following Monday. This romance of student life in Paris might entertain her, and at their next meeting he brought the subject up.

"Will you come to the theater on Monday?"

She seemed at a loss. "Aren't you busy on your picture?"

"Not at night."

"Well . . . if you like."

Monday came. When he had finished his session at the booth he put on his suit and a clean shirt. Just as he was ready she appeared. He was arrested by the expression of regret on her face.

"What's wrong?"

"I can't come with you tonight. Madame Armande's sister is down with *la grippe*. I must go to sit with her."

"Madame Armande can go."

"Ah, but there is a rush order to be got out."

"Well . . . I suppose it can't be helped." He was badly cast down.

"I am sorry." She gave his arm a little condoling pat. "Some other evening perhaps."

Her air of concern softened his disappointment. Nevertheless, as

he watched her hurry off, his dejection was so apparent that Jo-jo, observing him, strolled over.

"You're all dressed up. Where are you off to?"

"The theater. Come with me. It's *La Bohème.*"

"Opera? Not me. But let's have a drink."

They went across the square to a nearby café. It was a cheap but pleasant place with long benches and tables running out to the pavement. In the dim interior a mechanical piano was playing, and people were sitting in their shirt sleeves.

"What's your poison, Abbé?"

"Anything . . . vermouth."

When the drinks were brought by a strapping full-breasted young woman, Jo-jo said: "There's a wench for you." He took a gulp of his Pernod. "Name's Suzie. Why don't you try your luck?"

"Oh, go to the devil."

Jo-jo laughed. "That's better. Trouble with you, Abbé, you never let yourself go. You ought to get drunk, have a good time."

"I've tried that. It doesn't work with me."

"There's a tea dance every afternoon at the Negresco. Very high class. It might be interesting to go there." There was an odd inflection in Jo-jo's voice but Stephen shook his head.

Jo-jo threw up his hands resignedly. Then he said:

"What's happened to the bicycle beauty?"

"She had to go to Madame Armande's sister. She's sick."

"Ah." Jo-jo nodded. "An errand of mercy. Mademoiselle Nightingale the second." He shrugged slightly.

At seven o'clock Jo-jo went off to feed his horses. Stephen felt more cheerful. The evening was fine — it would be a shame to spend it in a stuffy theater. Suddenly he was struck by an idea. Why not make the trip to Lunel, find the Armande shop, wait until Emmy had completed her work and bring her back? With luck they might be in time to have supper together.

He found a northbound train. It was not yet eight o'clock when he reached Lunel, which was little more than a collection of small new stucco villas. Stephen went up and down the street without finding "The Straw Hat." Puzzled, he made inquiries which revealed that there was no hat shop in Lunel.

Stephen rode back to Nice on the bumpy tram. It was quite dark when he got to the circus grounds. Everything was quiet and deserted. He had an impulse to go to her quarters and find out if she had returned, but pride restrained him. He went into his caravan, lay down on his bunk and closed his eyes. He would have it out with her in the morning.

On the following day at eleven o'clock she appeared on her wagon steps, in a blue-and-white cotton dressing gown. She sat down on the top step, holding a cup of coffee. He went over.

"Good morning . . . how did you find your patient?"

"Oh, fairly well. I told you it was the grippe."

"Isn't that rather infectious? You must be careful."

"I can take care of myself."

"Really, I'm serious . . . there's a sharp wind out at Lunel. And one has to wait such a long time for the tram."

She looked at him suspiciously over the rim of the cup. "What do you know about Lunel?"

"I was out there last evening. I thought I might buy you a hat. Unfortunately I couldn't find a hat shop."

"Who the devil do you think you are, pushing your nose into other people's business? Spying on me. You dirty sneak."

"At least I'm not a liar."

"Who do you call a liar? What I told you was the truth. And now perhaps you'll shove off and let me have my breakfast in peace."

He felt that she was lying — her very vehemence was suspicious. Yet it was just possible that she spoke the truth. He wanted with all his soul to believe her.

"I was looking forward so much to our evening together. . . ."

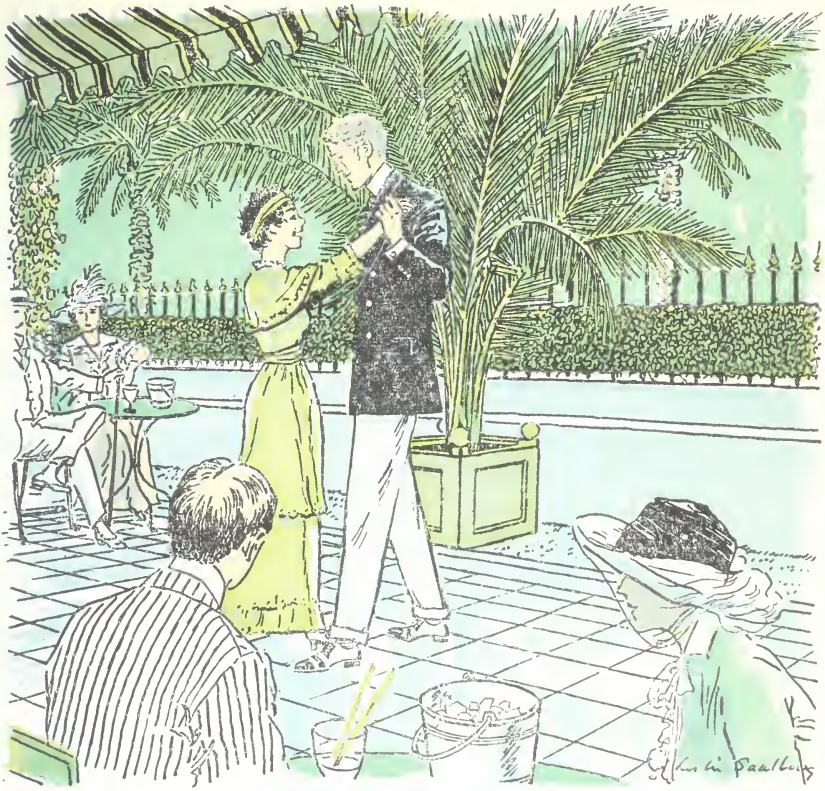
"That's no excuse."

"Anyhow, let's both forget it."

"Only if you apologize for what you called me."

He hesitated, but his need of her made him abject. "I'm sorry if I offended you." The words made him feel contemptible. He knew he could not go on like this, he must make certain.

Next day, after lunch, as she went toward the Place Pigalle, he followed. He had always despised the jealous man who spied upon



the woman he loved. Now he could not help himself. At the Pigalle terminus he saw her take a tram bound for the promenade, and as another was on the point of leaving he boarded it. In fifteen minutes he was at the sea front. He walked the length of the esplanade and back, made a tour of the Casino, but could see no sign of her. Then he suddenly recollected Jo-jo's manner when he spoke of the tea dance at the Negresco. He crossed the street and gazed through the gilt-tipped railings into the covered terrace of the hotel. An orchestra was playing a two-step to which a number of couples were dancing. Then another couple stepped onto the floor. The girl was smiling as she extended her arms to her partner. They glided off together — Chester and Emmy.

With an expressionless face, Stephen watched them. So expert was their exhibition they were allowed to monopolize the floor, and when they finally sat down they received applause.

Stephen walked slowly to a bench from which he could see the hotel entrance. The pain in his heart was almost unbearable. How she and Chester must have laughed together at his fatuous belief that she was modestly plying her needle, while all the time she had been with Harry. Madame Armande had undoubtedly spread word of the burlesque throughout the troupe. Certainly Jo-jo knew. What a fool he must have thought him.

Yet greater even than Stephen's mortification and rage was his frantic jealousy. He still wanted her. And as he sat there with his head between his hands, he tried to find excuses for her. After all, she was only dancing with Harry, and that surely was no crime.

At last, as dusk fell and strings of colored lights flashed on along the front of the hotel, Harry and Emmy appeared, and came along the promenade. Talking animatedly, they passed so close to him he could have hailed them. When they were fifty yards ahead he got up and followed.

A short distance beyond the Casino they turned up a side street and entered a small restaurant. Dinner for two, thought Stephen grimly. He buttoned his coat collar and posted himself in a doorway opposite. Only his need to discover the truth enabled him to maintain that weary and degrading vigil.

It was ten o'clock before Emmy and Chester emerged and got into a hansom cab. As they moved off, Stephen jumped into another cab, told the man to follow. With a sinking heart, he saw that they were heading toward Chester's apartment. At the end of the Rue des Lilas Stephen dismissed his cab. Farther along the quiet thoroughfare the other vehicle had drawn up; its two occupants were disappearing into the courtyard. Slowly, Stephen came forward and gazed up at Chester's balcony apartment. The light in one room was on; he could see the two figures moving behind the yellow blind. Then the light went out.

How long Stephen stood there, staring at the dark apartment, he could not tell. At last he turned and walked away.

He was back at the circus grounds before midnight. Without

awakening Jo-jo and the Croc, he packed his belongings in his saddlebag, strapped his canvases upon his back and, with a last look at his companions, pushed off on his bicycle.

He rode north, toward Auvergne. He felt the need to rejoin Peyrat, who must still be there. But mainly he was pressed forward by the desire to obliterate the memory of these last insufferable weeks. He snatched a meal when he could and slept behind haystacks, in deserted cowsheds, avoiding all human contact.

On Sunday morning, as he came onto a high plateau, a cold wet wind was blowing from the Alps, and soon rain began to fall. Crouched under a dripping hedge by the road, eating the remains of his food, he felt homeless, unreal as a ghost. The rain continued but he went on, more slowly, with a shortness of breath that caused him to dismount upon the steeper inclines.

Toward noon he began to feel extremely queer. He would never reach Auvergne in this fashion; he must get to a railroad. He looked at his map and saw that by heading west he could reach the junction at Digne. He set off on a crossroad. This was wilder, more difficult than before. The rain rapidly increased, and presently a deluge was upon him. Wet through, with darkness rapidly descending, he became alarmed, lit his carbide lamp and again consulted the map. Tracing with his finger, he saw he was on a dead-end track.

A fit of panic shook him, but he pedaled on, bent forward against the wind. A salt taste came into his mouth and, pressing his handkerchief against his lips, he felt it grow wet. His legs no longer belonged to him, a hammer was thumping in his head, but when he felt that he could go no farther he saw in the hollow before him the wavering lights of a hamlet.

Completely spent, he let his machine fall and stumbled up the path of the first cottage. The door was opened by a child, who stared at him, then turned and ran. They must take me in, he thought, I am going to be ill. . . .

A workman in a blue shirt came to the door, followed by a woman carrying a lamp. The woman gave an exclamation.

"Terribly sorry." With tremendous difficulty, he brought out the words. "Lost my way. Can you put me up?"

"Not here," the man said. "You must go along." He took Stephen by the shoulder, steered him from the house. Believing that he was being thrown out on the road, Stephen felt a dry smarting behind his eyes. Then he realized the man was supporting him in a dizzy passage down the street. As they advanced he murmured encouragement. "See, it's not far, we are nearly there."

They reached a large building with thick trees on either side. The man rang a bell. After a moment, a grille opened in the studded door and then they were admitted to a whitewashed hall with a bare stone floor and benches round the walls. Stephen gazed giddily about him. A hooded monk appeared, and the workman from the cottage, turning toward this new arrival, removed his sustaining arm. Stephen fell forward on his face, the bundle of sopping canvases still strapped on his back.

THE MORNING sun, slanting through the deep-set window, awakened him. He lay passive, his gaze traveling over the single straw-bottomed chair, the wardrobe, the wooden *prie-dieu* in the corner, the black crucifix on the white wall.

A light footstep on the sanded corridor outside caused him to turn his head. The Infirmarian entered, carrying his breakfast on a tray. "How did you sleep?"

"Very well."

"Good." Placing the tray on the chair, Dom Arthaud produced a thermometer from the recesses of his white habit and put it between Stephen's lips. He was a man of about fifty, sturdy and square-shouldered, with a broad, pleasant face and intelligent brown eyes. His head was tonsured; he wore sandals upon his bare feet. At the end of a minute he removed the thermometer, read it, then pushed the chair and tray up to the bed.

Stephen began his breakfast — a bowl of *café-au-lait,* fresh butter in an earthenware pot, sliced bread and fruit. As he dipped bread in the coffee he looked up at the monk.

"Won't you share this with me? There's enough for two."

"On no account. We have our meal at noon. And I have not been ill."

"I've meant to ask you . . . what was the matter with me?"

"You had an inflammation of the lung and you overstrained yourself. As a result you had a hemorrhage." He paused. "Have you suffered anything of that nature before?"

Stephen shook his head. "I had a cold some months ago. But it couldn't have come from that?"

"It would not be proper for me to answer. I am not a doctor."

"You pulled me through all right."

"With God's help." Dom Arthaud took up the empty tray. "You are to be up today, but do not rise just yet. The Reverend Prior is coming to visit you."

When he had gone Stephen settled back. His cough was almost gone and he no longer had the stabbing pain in his side. How good the sun felt on his cheek — the stirrings of convalescence had begun. Indeed, he wondered if his illness, with its strange depletion, had not been opportune. It had cured him of the pangs which had tormented him.

Looking back, he was amazed that for all these months he should have groveled for Emmy's favor. He rejoiced to be himself again, and solemnly vowed that in future no woman would have any part in his life. His work alone would concern him.

At eleven o'clock the Superior, a tall commanding figure in his white hooded robe, arrived, and studied Stephen gravely. "I am glad you are at last to leave your bed, my son."

"And I am grateful," Stephen answered. "Besides, it's high time I was clearing out. I have given you a vast amount of trouble."

"On the contrary, you are most welcome to stay. Dom Arthaud thinks it will be several weeks before you are fit to travel."

"But . . . I'm afraid I couldn't pay. . . ."

"Have we asked you for money, my son? Stay with us for a while. Sit in the sunshine in the garden. When you are stronger you will be better able to face the world."

The Prior rose and went out.

Stephen had to struggle to force back the tears. He got up, and when he was dressed he left his room and went along a stone-flagged corridor to the garden at the back. It was not large; a few paths laid out around some straggling rose beds led to a grotto,

with a statue at the far end. He knew the monks had built with their own hands the small chapel which stood white against the fleecy sky. Presently a service began in the chapel. He got up from the bench where he sat and crawled back to his room.

There he saw a letter, placed upon the narrow window ledge. About a week before he had scrawled a few lines to the tenant of 15 Rue Castel, asking him to forward his mail. He tore open the envelope. It was from Stillwater, dated two months previously.

> Dear Stephen,
>
> If this ever reaches you it will inform you of the death of Lady Broughton, in October. Some weeks before, the engagement of Claire and Geoffrey was announced. They are to be married quite soon. There is no other news except to say that Father continues to be most unhappy at your absence. I beg you to return and accept your responsibilities as a dutiful son.
>
> Yours,
> Caroline

He had known of Lady Broughton's illness, and his fondness for Claire had never been more than a brotherly affection. Yet this word from home, with its implied reproaches, seemed to cut him off more sharply from that pleasant life which normally would still be his. Caroline's letter made him feel a creature apart.

As THE week passed he grew stronger. One day, as he watched the novices playing handball, a remark, half laughing, half serious, was addressed to him. "Monsieur Desmonde, since you are an artist, why don't you paint a fine picture for our church?"

"Why not?" Stephen answered, with a serious air. The idea struck him as an admirable way of expressing his gratitude and relieving his enforced idleness.

That afternoon he spoke to the Superior. At first the Prior hesitated. The chapel was dear to his heart. Would it be wise to place it in the hands of an unknown painter whose few canvases, while strangely compelling, gave no evidence of orthodox proficiency?

"Tell me, my son, what you propose to do."

"I should like to paint a fresco above the altar on the end wall of the apse. I thought of the Transfiguration."

"Could you produce something of which we would approve?"

"I would try. I have no pigments, no brushes large enough. You would have to get these for me. You would have to take me on trust. But if you do so, I promise to do my best."

Next morning two of the fathers departed for Garonde, returning in the evening with various brown paper packages. Meanwhile, the novices had erected a light wooden scaffolding behind the altar. With that excitement which he always experienced at the beginning of a work, Stephen took up his brush.

The atmosphere of the chapel induced in him emotions quite foreign to his nature. The work came into being with surprising ease. He blocked in the central figure of the Lord and outlined the features of Moses and Elias. His colors, usually so hard, were soft and flat; his forms seemed disturbingly conventional. Yet against his doubts of the work was the growing approval of the community. Often as he turned on the scaffold to clean his brushes he would observe in the eyes of some novice who had come in to pray a look of rapture. Was not that reassurance enough? The fresco was finished within three weeks.

"My son," the Prior said to Stephen, "now I know that your coming here was providential. This fresco will endure beyond the lifetime of all of us. We are most deeply in your debt. Tomorrow we shall celebrate a High Mass to consecrate your work."

Next morning the altar was ablaze with candles. The Superior, assisted by Dom Arthaud, sang the Mass while the choir chanted the responses, and the painting glowed in the candlelight.

After the ceremony the porter came to Stephen with a queer expression. "There is a visitor to see you. A gentleman who says he has come to take you back to Paris."

Stephen went to his room. There, reclining on the bed puffing furiously at his pipe, was Peyrat. He jumped up, kissed Stephen on both cheeks. "What have you been up to? A dozen times I have tried to reach you. An announcement was made last month which has caused me to chase after you all over France."

"What on earth are you driving at?"

"An announcement," Peyrat continued, rolling the words over his tongue, "which will put a medal on your breast, fifteen hundred francs in your pocket, and permit us to take our trip to Spain." He threw his arms round Stephen and once again kissed him. "Your *Circe* has won you the Prix de Luxembourg."

Chapter Nine

On a gray afternoon early in June 1914 Stephen came along the fashionable Rue St. Honoré toward the Place Vendôme. He had been to the Soulat auction rooms, where Peyrat had sent ten of his paintings to pay his share of the expenses of their Spanish expedition. The first of Peyrat's original and imaginative canvases had caused a faint titter, the second a ripple of amusement, and by the time the final canvas was exhibited the crowd was laughing heartily. The entire ten were knocked down to the same unknown buyer for a total of four hundred and eighty francs. Stephen remained behind to question the clerk. The ten paintings had been secured by an agent of the art dealer Tessier.

"Why did he go after these?" asked Stephen grimly.

The clerk shrugged. "What one buys today for fifty francs one may sell in ten years' time for fifty thousand . . . if one is Tessier."

Stephen left the office saying some bad words to himself. Then, passing opposite the stuffy portals of the Clifton Hotel, he smiled reflectively. Suddenly his expression altered. Advancing toward him, from the hotel, was his uncle Hubert. With set features, convinced that General Desmonde would cut him, Stephen went on. However, he was wrong — Hubert halted.

"Stephen." He did not extend his hand. "This is fortunate. I thought I might have to reach you at the Rue Castel. I very much want to see you, and I suppose you'd like news of home."

"How is my father?"

"Fairly well. They all seem to be. Davie's quite a tall chap now and quite recovered from those unfortunate attacks. My lot are pretty fit, too. Geoffrey and Claire nicely settled." He shot a glance under his brows. "Claire is expecting a child in the summer."

"You hope for a boy, of course."

Stephen's satiric lightness caused General Desmonde to compress his lips. He looked at him steadily.

"You must come home, Stephen. If not for your family, for your country. There is going to be war. In a matter of weeks Germany will attack Britain. We shall need every available man."

Stephen, understanding at last what was in Hubert's mind, experienced a deepening resentment. How often in the past had the General given false warning of the imminence of war! It was an obsession with him.

"I am afraid I must disappoint you. I am not coming home."

"I see." Hubert's voice was cold. "You intend to continue slouching around here in indolence and dissipation."

"Would it surprise you to know that I work twelve hours a day? I'll wager I work harder at my art than ever you did on the parade ground."

"Your art!" Hubert's lip curled. "What rot!"

"Is it absurd to be concerned only with what is beautiful, and not with the business of killing people? We artists are the ones who matter to the world — the works of the great artists will be cherished long after all your bloody conquests are forgotten."

The General, extremely angry, bit his lip. "I refuse to argue. You are British and a Desmonde. At a time like this you can't get away with daubing paint on canvas. You must come home."

"And I refuse." Preserving a faint, fixed smile which more than anything enraged his uncle, Stephen went on his way.

The Biarritz express was on the point of departure. Stephen stood outside his compartment, awaiting Peyrat with increasing anxiety. Just as the whistle sounded, he observed a familiar figure, walking calmly up the platform, wearing a dilapidated coat, carrying an easel and a carpetbag of terrifying antiquity.

They got into the moving train in the nick of time, and when they had found places Peyrat turned to Stephen with a smile which irradiated his unshaven face. "You must forgive me. I am late. In the Metro a young curé engaged me in conversation on the subject of the Discalced Rule of Sainte Thérèse."

His soft voice and affectionate manner, so polite, gentle and gay, made Stephen relent. "A fine thing if you had been left behind."

"My friend," Peyrat said, "do not reproach me for pursuing so fascinating a subject." He added, after a moment of thought, "Poverty will save the world."

"Poverty will not save us. I have got your money from the Soulat auction and we have only nineteen hundred francs between us."

"Divide it equally," said Peyrat calmly. "Or if you wish, let me have it all. I will be our treasurer." Then, pointing to his carpetbag, "I've got a Bayonne ham there, given me by Madame Huffnaegel. We shall not starve."

The train gathered speed through the outer suburbs, and remembering how excellently Peyrat had managed in the Rue Castel, Stephen, never any good with money, handed over the packet of bank notes. Accepting this placidly, Jerome stuffed it in his bulging pocketbook, full of frayed documents and held together with string. Then he studied his companion.

"You seem depressed, my friend. Has anything upset you?"

"No," said Stephen; then, on impulse, "Someone wanted to make a soldier of me."

Peyrat sucked meditatively on the cold stem of his pipe. "Monstrous. In the days of chivalry the knights engaged in battle of their own free will. It was sport to them and all they were good for. No one dreamed of sending a poet or a philosopher to battle."

Stephen listened with a smile, quite cheered up. How good it was to be traveling with so original a friend, always naively happy and, while sometimes absurd, yet on occasion so wise.

THEY reached Madrid late the following afternoon and found two modest rooms in a poor neighborhood adjoining the fruit market. Peyrat, in bad Spanish, arranged the terms and paid for a week's lodging in advance.

On the morning after their arrival Stephen roused Jerome. "Seven o'clock. We ought to get to the Prado early."

Peyrat, supported by an elbow, considered his companion with indulgence. "Nothing is early in this country. The Prado does not open until nine thirty. In any case I am not going."

"Then why have we come to Madrid?"

"To enable you to view the Prado. But there is little point in my going. What others have done does not influence me."

"Not even the great masters?"

"I am perhaps a master myself," Peyrat said simply. "Besides, I am going to Ávila, the birthplace of Thérèse."

Stephen felt annoyed by this unexpected desertion. He drained his cup and got up. "I'm off now."

"I shall be absent for some days," Peyrat said. "How are you situated for money?"

"I have about thirty pesetas," Stephen answered shortly. "I don't expect to be dining at the Ritz."

"Then that should suffice till I return." Peyrat nodded gravely. *"Adios, amigo."*

As Stephen entered the Prado, the long galleries were empty except for a few copyists. He felt within him an answering glow as he came upon El Greco and Velasquez, but it was the end gallery that drew him. This, he thought, with a tremor of instinctive delight, is my painter, this at last is Goya. Never before had he seen work so passionate, charged with such devastating truth. The glutton, the toper, the voluptuary, all were here in savage caricatures. Here, created by this simple man from Aragon, was a world filled with all the frightfulness of human brutality, yet leavened by tenderness and pity — the compassionate protest of a man appalled by the oppression, superstition and hypocrisy of his day.

It was evening when Stephen was ousted from the museum. The cafés were crowded now, the pavements overflowed with people slowly promenading. It was the time of the *paseo*. All classes, all ages were there. Stephen could pick out faces that seemed to come straight from Goya's drawings.

During the next three days he applied himself with intensity to his study of these drawings in the Prado. Despite this, he missed Peyrat. It was therefore with a throb of pleasure that, on the evening of the fourth day, while sketching from memory, he heard a familiar footstep. A moment later Jerome entered dramatically

with the carpetbag, flung back his woolen shawl and embraced him.

"You enjoyed Ávila?"

"Surpassing my expectation. I stood on the very spot where Thérèse was born. The house was in the ghetto of the town."

"You visited the convent of her order?"

"Naturally. It is falling to pieces, and infested with rats. However, I was happy."

"Have you had supper?"

"I ate some indescribable provisions on the train. Ah, it is good to be with you. And tomorrow we shall be off again."

"But we planned to stay another two weeks in Madrid."

"Ah, what is Madrid! Besides, we have our railway tickets to Granada. Once in Granada, we shall buy a donkey and a little cart and set out by road for Seville."

"Set out by road?" Stephen echoed the words stupidly.

"Assuredly. We shall be pilgrims of joy, singing on our way, begging if need be, living off the land."

"Are you quite out of your mind?" Stephen said sharply.

There was a pause. Peyrat murmured:

"My friend, bear me no ill will. What I propose is sheer necessity. Moved by their poverty, so much greater than ours, I have given our money, except for two hundred pesetas, to the good Mother Superior of the convent in memory of Sainte Thérèse."

THROUGH the streaming windows of the station waiting room in Granada Stephen watched the branches of a row of eucalyptus trees sway and drip in a chilly wind that swept down from the Sierra Nevada. They had arrived at four o'clock that morning. Still filled with resentment at finding all his plans dissipated at a single stroke, Stephen had let Peyrat depart alone for the town market when light appeared. Now, through the rear window, he saw a light cart, drawn by a small donkey, approach smartly and stop at the station entrance. The rain was ceasing and he went out.

"Where did you get this?"

"From a gypsy in the market. I struck an excellent bargain." Peyrat spoke with pride. "As you see, the cart is sound. The don-

key, though perhaps not large, is very hardy. His master wept on parting with him."

There was such obvious desire for a reconciliation in Jerome's voice that Stephen relented slightly. "You might have done worse."

"And look." Peyrat indicated a number of packages in the back of the cart. "Bread, bananas, cheese, wine. With our ham we have enough for a week or so."

At that moment the sun came out, warm and brilliant in the clearing sky. All at once it seemed a gay adventure to set out in this free fashion. Stephen's spirits lifted. "Let's be off."

They piled their possessions into the cart and drove away. The donkey pulled with a good heart; soon they were out of the town. Stephen, on the narrow driver's seat, breathed the warm aromatic air of orange groves with delight. Afternoon passed and twilight came. They were now beginning to ascend the foothills of the Sierra. No human habitation was in sight but a small ravine sheltered by a clump of pines seemed a suitable encampment. They unharnessed the donkey and tethered him in a patch of grass where the admirable little beast began quietly to graze. Then they ate supper. The night was soft, black and warm; pine needles carpeted the dry sand on which they stretched themselves. Almost at once Stephen was asleep.

The days that followed were delightful. Stephen and Peyrat moved without haste, spending most of each day sketching. The smell of jasmine hung in the air. At night Peyrat played the ocarina. Then with a romantic air he would seek repose, quoting the Spanish couplet:

"I spread my cloak upon the ground
And fling myself to sleep."

Toward the end of the second week, the mountains loomed nearer, and they began striking up a steep winding road into wild and rugged country. There was not a tree in this great barren sweep of burned and tortured rock. The sun blazed down; the ascent was precipitous. Yet there was no alternative but to go on. To ease their donkey they walked beside the cart. The willing little

beast was showing signs of the lack of proper pasture; their provisions were exhausted. At last, on the ninth day, a village, white as a heap of petrified bones, was discernible in the distance.

Peyrat briskened. "We are certain to find an inn here. It will be a relief to have a roof over our heads again."

They entered the single narrow street of the village, where a few women in black sat on low chairs, crocheting lace. The inn was a low dilapidated house, set in a dirty yard where several donkeys were tethered. Within the dark interior some men were seated at a table drinking from a black goatskin. Peyrat called the landlord

and a slow, lumpish fellow with small eyes and a long, unshaven chin detached himself from the group.

"My friend, we are artists, in distress. Will you, of your courtesy, afford us a meal and lodging for the night? In return we will paint your portrait, or that of your good wife."

The man gave Peyrat a prolonged stare. "We turn no one from our door. But I require no portrait and I have no wife."

"Then if you choose, we will make a sign for your inn."

"But I do not choose, señor."

"Then name something that we can do for you."

"You can enter, señor, eat well and sleep soft. But of course you must pay."

"We are without money."

The man gazed from one to the other, slyly. "Then give me something of fair value — a cloth coat or a pair of stout boots."

Jerome made a sign of assent. "The ruffian is holding us up," he muttered to Stephen. "Napoleon was right to say, 'Never trust a man with a long chin.' I shall give my boots. But only these old ones I am wearing. I have a better pair in my bag."

Supper proved to be as wretched as the inn, and it was a relief at last to escape to the hay spread in a vacant stall adjoining the stable. In the morning they set off across a parched yellow plain, relieved only by an infrequent grove of silvery olive trees and herds of dusty black goats. Stephen did not mind, for this strange lunar landscape thrilled him; but Peyrat, plodding moodily at the donkey's head, victim of his own philanthropy, was childish and disagreeable. That evening, camped beside a stony arroyo, after a mush of maize cooked in a can picked up by the wayside, he broke a dejected silence.

"These new boots, made for the pavements of Paris, are hurting my feet atrociously. Already I have a galling blister on my heel. I fear I have led you into an unfortunate situation. I mistook the nature of this countryside, which, if one can believe that rogue of a landlord, is equally poor to the west of us. Only one solution presents itself — to abandon the road to Seville. We will cut down south to the port of Málaga."

Stephen nodded his agreement, but Peyrat, socks off, was tenderly examining his heel. "My friend, I may have joined my discalced order. I seriously doubt I shall get these boots on much longer."

THREE DAYS later when they were halfway to Málaga, the real trouble began. They had stopped to rest by the roadside in the shade of a clump of cork trees. Beside them, in the shade of the uptilted cart, the donkey stood motionless. Blackened by the sun, unshaven, Stephen had the appearance of a tramp. Peyrat, with one foot bare, had rolled up his trouser leg to the knee. He turned to Stephen. "My leg pains me. Will you look at it?"

Stephen looked casually at the leg. Then, disquieted, he examined it more thoroughly. Although he had several times seen Peyrat dispense with the tight boots and limp along barefoot in the dust, he had never suspected that the condition had become so acute. The right foot was swollen and inflamed, the heel ulcerated.

"No more walking for you." Stephen assumed a confident tone. "It's slightly infected. Let's see what we can do about it."

He took his spare shirt from his valise, and tore off several strips. Moistening these with water, which they carried in an old wine bottle, he cleansed the raw, inflamed area as best he could and applied a loose moist bandage. "How does that feel?"

"Cool . . . in fact, somewhat easier."

Stephen harnessed the burro, assisted Peyrat to the cart and started off. He set a good pace at the donkey's head but, whenever they approached an incline, he fell behind and pushed on the tailboard. They must get to Málaga as soon as possible. Stephen had noticed with growing uneasiness that Peyrat's cheeks were flushed, and now a faint foreboding crossed his mind.

The road was favorable for the next few kilometers, and as the light began to fade they came to a large barn filled with fresh hay, which promised them not only a comfortable night but fodder for the animal. Stephen brought Peyrat inside; then, after several attempts, he caught and milked one of the goats pastured nearby. In the cart were some green cobs of maize they had picked some days before. With these he prepared a hot dish of corn and milk.

"How do you feel now?" he asked, when Jerome had eaten.

"My friend, I am deeply touched by your care."

"Yes, yes . . . but your foot?"

"It is throbbing, naturally. But after a good night's rest I shall be perfectly recovered."

But Peyrat did not rest well, and in the morning he looked definitely worse. Stephen was thoroughly alarmed. He filled the cart with hay, made Peyrat as comfortable as possible on this improvised couch, and hastened to be off. The donkey, refreshed and fed, went with a will. If only they could reach Málaga before dark, Stephen thought, he would go immediately to the British consulate for help. He drove forward still harder, only stopping occasionally

to give Peyrat a drink of water. Jerome's skin was hot with fever.

As the afternoon passed and the granite boulders that studded the landscape cast shadows on the dusty earth, a sense of helplessness struck at Stephen. His gallant little beast, flanks sodden and heaving, head drooping, was almost spent and they were still far from the coast. At his wits' end he gazed desperately about him. All at once, at the end of a rough track, he saw a small, white house with an adjoining thatched hut standing in a patch of wasteland. As he drew near, a woman came out of the low doorway, her head a little to one side, as though listening to his approach.

She was about sixty years old, dressed in worn black, with a heavy figure and a face almost Negroid in its darkness. Her eyes were strangely opaque, and Stephen saw in the center of each pupil the yellowish blight of trachoma. But it was the placidity of that sightless face which most truly revealed that she was blind.

"Señora." The word came raspingly from his dry throat. "We are strangers, traveling to Málaga. My friend is sick. I entreat you to give us shelter for the night."

She stood motionless, her hands crossed before her. It was as if, through some vibration in the air, she sought to discover the nature and character of these unknown visitors. Then she turned, led the way to the hut and opened the door.

"This may serve you." She made a gesture with her hands. "There is a place for your burro behind."

The shock of this sudden security was such that Stephen was unable to utter a word of thanks. It was a poor room, but clean, the floor of beaten earth. A table and a wooden chair stood under a hanging oil lamp. In the far corner, on a wooden trestle, was a flock mattress. He helped Peyrat out of the cart and, almost carrying him, onto the low bed. He washed the dust from his face and got him into a clean shirt. Next he stabled the donkey, giving it fresh water and all the hay that remained in the cart. As he returned to the hut he met the woman carrying an earthenware bowl filled with thick bean soup.

"Take this for your supper. It may help your friend."

"Your kindness leaves me without words. Believe me, we had need of your help."

"If you are worse off than I, then you are badly off indeed."

"You live alone here?"

"Completely. But I manage. I grow these beans. I exist."

Then, as he remained silent, she turned slowly and left him.

He took the soup to Peyrat, but Jerome had turned irritable and kept pushing the spoon away. Nor would he permit Stephen to examine his leg. He will never be fit to travel in the cart tomorrow, thought Stephen, nor will the burro be fit to move. Then he thought: I must not waste the soup. Seated at the table, his harassed gaze fixed on the sick man, who lay muttering in his half-sleep, he drank it quickly. Presently, with the empty bowl, he went to the door of the house. The woman answered his knock.

"Is it a far distance to Málaga?"

"Yes, it is far. More than ten kilometers."

Ten kilometers . . . He could walk that distance in three hours and, by starting at dawn, reach the consulate before nine o'clock. "Señora, I must go to Málaga early tomorrow. I shall leave my friend, also the burro, but have no fear, I shall return soon after noon. Is such an arrangement agreeable to you?"

In some strange fashion she seemed to measure him with her sightless eyes. "It is agreeable. But do not call me señora. My name is Luisa Mendez. And do not speak to me of fear. I have long passed the stage of having fear."

He went back to the hut and, after a last look at Peyrat, lay down on the beaten floor.

NEXT MORNING, as he crossed the last summit and came down the steep incline toward Málaga, Stephen felt a sudden gleam of hope. Hastening through the outskirts, he made his way toward the main square. He began to sense a singular stir in the streets. Men were standing in groups around the cafés talking and gesticulating, and a large crowd had collected outside the offices of the newspaper *Gaceta de la Caleta*. Stephen spoke to a man on the edge of the gathering. "Friend, what is the reason of this assembly?"

"Why man, we are waiting for the next edition of the paper, for news of the war."

Observing the look of stupefaction on Stephen's face, he offered

the folded newspaper which he carried in his hand. "This is of yesterday."

The sheet was dated August 7, 1914. The smudged headlines struck Stephen like a blow and he recollected all that Hubert had said to him in Paris. With an expression of thanks he hurried off to the consulate.

The door there was open and, as Stephen entered, he found the hall and staircase already crowded. Many of the people ahead of him were tourists, more upset by the interruption of their holiday than by any premonition of world disaster. They chattered, even joked, as the queue moved slowly forward.

When an official emerged from the room on the right, Stephen stepped forward. He said, rapidly:

"May I speak with you? It's a matter of importance."

With an exclamation of annoyance the official looked at Stephen. He was under thirty, with thinning hair and a fair complexion. His gaze traveled with distaste over the dusty, worn boots, the dingy shirt; then a faint look of recognition appeared upon his face. Pleasantly he said, "Why . . . yes." He led the way into a small office. "Sit down, won't you? I'm George Hollis."

"My name is Desmonde."

The other smiled. "Now I remember. You came up to Trinity in '09. That was my last year. I felt sure we'd met."

Stephen shook the proffered hand. Then he said: "I hate to impose on you at a time like this."

Hollis waved away the apology.

"I understand. We all want to get back in double-quick time to get into the show. Tell me, what are you doing out here?"

"I've been on a painting trip, with a friend — "

"Ah, sort of walking tour. Now, let me see what we can do for you." He consulted a paper. "We're practically off our heads trying to get people home. The frontier is closed so trains are impossible. But there's a freighter leaving soon. By pulling a few strings we may get you a berth on her."

"Thank you." Stephen was desperate to come to the point. "In the meantime, could I tax your goodness further? My friend is seriously ill. I must get him a good doctor."

"Dr. Cabra, in the Calle Estada, would be your man. I'll give you a note to him." Hollis wrote on the consulate notepaper, pushed the envelope across the desk.

"You are really too kind. I'm grateful." Stephen spoke with feeling. "When may I see you again?"

"Look in any time. I ought to have news for you in a few days." He stood up with a smile. "We might dine together one evening before you go."

STEPHEN found the Calle Estada without difficulty. A servant admitted him, and accepted his letter. A few moments later the doctor appeared. He was a youngish man, small, dapper, with a round, smooth, saffron face in which his sloe-dark eyes seemed to twinkle with perpetual good nature.

As briefly as possible, Stephen explained the situation. The little doctor looked thoughtful. Then, after questioning Stephen on one or two points, he nodded. "Impossible to treat your friend at such a distance. We must bring him into the hospital. We shall requisition the hospital ambulance and proceed together."

"Then we may leave at once?"

"When I have had breakfast. Come and join me." As he showed Stephen into a small, paneled sitting room where coffee and rolls were set out on a tray, he added: "I have been on a case most of the night. Such fun to bring a fine boy into the world. And such joy for the mother."

"It was a first baby?"

"Oh, no, no. The tenth. And all alive and healthy."

He sent for another cup, poured coffee for Stephen, proffered the platter of rolls. Then he began his own meal, talking almost continuously, deploring the war, but predicting its speedy ending, discoursing on the beauty of Málaga, the excellent climate. Finally he said: "If you had not come to me for your friend I should have suspected that you were the patient. You are much underweight and you have a cough."

"It is nothing."

"So it is nothing. Well then, smile a little, for a change."

Stephen reddened. "I daresay I am anxious about my friend."

Cabra leaned forward and pressed Stephen's hand.

"We shall do our best for him."

They left the house and in five minutes were at the Casa de Socorro, the emergency hospital, where the ambulance, a field model with a canvas top, stood in the cobbled yard. The doctor cranked the engine and presently they were moving out of the town at a surprisingly good pace. Cabra drove with incredible lack of caution, but as the dust clouds billowed behind them the road Stephen had tramped that morning steadily diminished. Presently they were bumping across the wasteland to the house of Luisa Mendez. In the hut, Peyrat was lying on his back, a compress on his forehead. Seated at the table, wringing out a fresh cloth in a bowl of water, was Luisa. Stephen went to the bed.

"Jerome, I've brought the doctor. How have you been?"

"I have been suffering." His eyes, bright in his furrowed, yellow face, turned suspiciously toward Cabra. "But now I am mending rapidly, thanks to the ministrations of this good woman. Though I admit to a painful ringing in my ears. Indeed, because of that," Peyrat raised himself upon his elbow, speaking through dry, cracked lips, "I have been reflecting upon the subject of bells . . . their immense variety . . ."

"Amigo," Cabra placed a restraining hand on Peyrat's shoulder, "be silent and permit me to examine you."

Peyrat closed his eyes and sank back, exhausted, submitting while the doctor took his pulse and temperature.

"Does your leg still hurt?"

"No," said Peyrat, feebly but with a triumphant air, not opening his eyes. "It is absolutely without pain."

Stephen saw the doctor's expression alter.

"Ah, then perhaps we may look at it." Cabra turned down the blanket, removed the dressing and made his investigation. When he straightened, he said with false cheerfulness, "Well, *amigo,* don't you think it time you were in a comfortable bed? We have one for you at the San Miguel."

Peyrat moved his lips in protest. Stephen could see that his imaginative, childish soul was struck with fear.

"I'll come with you," Stephen said to him.

"No." The doctor was emphatic. "If you are not careful, you too will be ill. Stay here and rest."

"When shall I come? Tomorrow morning?"

"Let us say the day after tomorrow."

"Then you are hopeful?" Stephen asked in a low voice.

Cabra looked away. "The leg is in a serious condition. The foot is probably gangrenous. If he is to live something must be done at once. But, rest assured, we shall do it."

On the stretcher, Peyrat kept his eyes tightly shut, murmuring incoherent phrases. But as the moment of departure arrived he signed to Stephen. "Let me have my ocarina."

He was clutching it as, slowly and with considerable care, Cabra drove off. Stephen stood there a long time, watching. The blind woman, in a posture of listening, stood beside him.

EARLY next morning, the sun struck through a rent in the sacking that served for the window of the hut. It awoke Stephen, who had slept as one dead. He got up in a mood of sick wretchedness. The old woman was at the dome-shaped oven in the yard, drawing from its blackened mouth a flat loaf of bread. As he approached, without turning her head, she broke the new loaf and handed him a piece, still steaming and damp. It seemed as though with every other faculty than sight she saw him, sounded the depth of his distress. Suddenly she said:

"You are thinking of the other?"

"Yes."

"Have you known him long?"

"Long enough to call him my friend. I have much anxiety for him."

"It will pass." There was a grave fatalism in her voice. "Work is the best cure for sadness. I have need of brushwood for this oven. Usually I bring it from the clearing beyond the valley."

He went to the stable. The donkey was glad to see him, rubbing its muzzle against his shoulder. He harnessed it to the cart, then took a rusted machete from a hook beside the stall and started out across the arroyo to the place Luisa had indicated. There, while the donkey began to nibble the leaves of the briers and bushes,

Stephen took off his shirt and set to work. The machete was old and blunt, but with a kind of desperate intensity he slashed at the tough scrub, trying to stifle the images that crowded in upon him.

Yet he did not succeed. When he wrenched his thoughts from Peyrat, they turned toward the war. At this moment men were killing and being killed. Recollection of Hubert's taunt brought the blood rushing to his brow. He must go back, and quickly, if only to prove that he was not afraid.

All day he worked, bringing one load of brush after another to the yard behind the stable. As he came in with the final one Luisa was standing at the door.

"That is a good load for the last journey."

"How can you tell?"

"By the creak of the axle and the breathing of the burro. Supper is ready. Tonight, if you wish, you may eat at my table."

He bedded down the ass for the night, washed in a bucket drawn from the well and then entered the house. Like the shed, it had only one room and was almost as sparsely furnished.

The woman bade him be seated and, from a pot on the charcoal brazier, served him a heaped dish of beans cooked with pimientos. Then she took the chair opposite him. The beans were coated with oil and tasted of garlic, but he was hungry and their meaty warmth made him feel less tired.

"You worked well today — though you are not used to it. I shall not want for brush this winter when the snow blows across from the Sierras."

"Have you lived here always?"

"No, man. I am from the town of Jerez. My husband, who died five years ago, was a cooper, making hoops for the wine casks. Had he kept to the outside of the cask all would have been well. But he went within, and for drunkenness was dismissed. Then my eyes became bad. The lids swelled and I was without sight."

"Then you knew poverty."

"Worse still . . . humiliation. In Jerez, there is a strange custom. When one is destitute, one is given the blue uniform of charity and sent into the streets to solicit alms for the common fund. One becomes officially a beggar."

"That was a hard thing to do."

"You speak truly, man. I would lie awake at night, longing for a little place in the country where we could grow food for ourselves. Then came a great sadness. Our only son was killed by a train. We sought no compensation, but the rich people who give the uniforms saw that it was paid. And with that we achieved this small place. We named it *Estancia Felipe* for our son."

"It is a good place," he said, wishing to praise her.

"It was good. Now it is gone to nothing. How can I maintain it alone?"

There was a silence. He had finished his cup of water and, rising, she refilled it. "You go to Málaga tomorrow and return in the evening?" she asked.

"If you permit it. I have no other place. I shall do work for you in payment."

She did not answer and although her sad, heavy face gave no sign he knew he had said a wrong thing. He corrected himself quickly: "I meant, not in payment, but in gratitude."

"That was well spoken."

A sudden thought came to him. He said: "The burro and the cart would be of some service to you. We no longer have use for them. Will you accept them, as an expression of our thanks?"

She did not answer. Her thick, seamed lips that looked as though cut from a dark wood quivered slightly, she drew a sighing breath. Then, unexpectedly, she leaned forward and with the forefinger of one hand lightly explored the contours of his face. When she had finished she offered neither explanation nor apology. She rose, gathered up the empty dish, the metal spoon and cup.

"For your journey tomorrow you must rest. Sleep well. Then you will better withstand whatever the day may bring."

On the following afternoon, Stephen reached the Hospital San Miguel and nervously rang the bell. Presently a sister in the blue robe and winged wimple of St. Vincent de Paul came to the grille, and when he had given his name admitted him to a superb fifteenth-century patio and asked him to sit down.

Why did they make him wait so long? At last there came a brisk

step, and from a side door Dr. Cabra appeared, wearing a short white coat. He shook hands with Stephen, and seated himself beside him on the stone bench.

"Well, here you are. Forgive me if I kept you waiting." With a sympathetic look, he placed his hand on Stephen's shoulder. It was a gesture that filled Stephen's heart with foreboding. The news is bad, he thought, as Cabra said: "I want to tell you what has been done for your friend. When I brought him to the hospital I immediately opened the leg. We then used all the remedies at our command to control the septicemia. But without effect."

Stephen felt his throat contract. There was a silence broken only by the faint intermittent murmur from the nuns in their choir. Stephen bit hard on his lip, assailed by a dreadful certainty.

"I had to make a decision. I decided to amputate. His condition was poor, yet he could not survive without it. The operation went well and was quickly over. However, shock supervened late yesterday evening. All we had done was of no avail." He paused. "The end came at eleven o'clock last night."

Stephen had known even before Cabra spoke, yet his mind seemed incapable of accepting the knowledge. So soon, so suddenly, the private, impersonal death of Jerome Peyrat. Cabra murmured: "If I can help in any way, with the necessary arrangements . . ."

"He is here?"

"No. At the mortuary of mendicants. By our charter we are enabled to provide a simple funeral. You do not mind?"

"No. Peyrat will not be the last artist to die without the price of a coffin in his pocket." He stood up. "Forgive me. You have been kind. When can I go to the mortuary?"

Cabra looked at his watch. "It is closed until seven. Come first to my house. There are papers to sign."

"Thank you. Although it may take a little time, I can assure you that you will be paid."

"You owe me nothing. Someday perhaps you will paint me a picture as a souvenir of a meeting that held both pleasure and sorrow." As he escorted Stephen to the doorway, he continued, in a voice of curiosity, "In his fever your friend spoke continually the name Thérèse."

"She was someone . . . he admired."

"An affair of the heart?"

"No, only of the spirit."

"Ah, then, she died before him?"

"Yes," Stephen said, with sudden violence. "Four hundred years ago."

He went out, walking at random, head lowered. He went through the public gardens, between rows of tamarisks, clipped like umbrellas. Then, he found himself on the sea front, moving toward the breakwater.

A mood of the darkest and most abject desolation was upon him. Peyrat dead. And now, as a soldier, he must abandon his work, a loss worse by far than any ordeal by battle. Was he afraid? The question was so puerile he did not even consider it. He had long since ceased to value his life in terms of physical survival. Did Hubert's scornful attitude bear weight upon him? Perhaps. Yet, in reality, he cared nothing for Hubert, nor for his family, nor for any man's opinion of his conduct. The only thing that mattered was this creative instinct that burned within him. To paint was his passion, a need more urgent than hunger or thirst.

He was now at the end of the pier, and he sat down beside the lighthouse to rest. On the sea wall a boy was fishing, baiting his hook with fragments of shrimp, and from time to time whipping from the water tiny, silvery fish which he thrust into a canvas bag. Stephen's hand went instinctively to his pocket for the sketchbook which he had not used for many days. It was not there. The longing to work again rose within him like a ferment. He thought, I must paint, I must, or I shall go mad.

For a long time he remained motionless. Then, all at once, through the tormented effort to grapple with his situation, he was conscious of a moment of illumination. At the same time through the soft damp air came the creak of oars on wooden oarlocks, the sound of men singing. The sardine fleet was beginning to leave the harbor for the night fishing grounds. Beyond the breakwater they shipped their oars, hoisted lateen sails. Out and away they went, dipping, rising on the quiet swell, disappearing like a flight of swallows into the misty distance. The beauty of the scene ap-

peased the anguish of his heart, strengthened the purpose that had formed within him. As grayness was falling like a shroud upon the dome of the cathedral, near which, in the mortuary, lay the body of Peyrat, he rose and went toward the town.

As he came past the gates of the harbor someone hailed him. He swung round and saw Hollis, the British vice-consul, hurrying toward him. "Desmonde, I thought I recognized you. I have good news. The SS *Murcia,* a Star Line freighter, has been cleared for Liverpool, leaving on Tuesday, and the Consul General managed to save a berth for you. And I've got leave to go home and join the show. I shall be on the old tub too." Hollis was plainly delighted. "We shall probably be in the fo'c's'le, so bring a blanket and I'll take along a few tins of bully beef. Incidentally, I don't believe she'll have an escort. As enemy submarines are in the Mediterranean we might have a bit of fun."

Stephen said: "I'm sorry. I am not going back."

"What's that?"

"I am not returning to England. I am going to stay here."

Hollis's expression changed from stunned amazement, through incredulity, into cold contempt. "And what do you propose to do?"

"I am going to paint." Stephen turned and walked off rapidly into the gathering darkness.

Chapter Ten

On a wet October morning in the year 1920, breakfast in the red-carpeted morning room at Broughton Court was almost over. General Desmonde, visiting for the shooting, was spreading marmalade on crisp toast.

Geoffrey broke the vaguely constrained silence. "Confound this weather. Never saw such rain. The coverts will be sopping and the birds won't fly."

Thwarted in his pride as a man of property — the Court had come to him through his marriage to Claire — Geoffrey lounged back and moodily turned the pages of the morning paper. Suddenly, an exclamation broke from him.

"By George! Listen to this." He read: *"Yesterday saw the opening at the Maddox Galleries of an exhibition of paintings by Stephen Desmonde. Mr. Desmonde, whose controversial picture, 'Circe and Her Lovers,' won the Prix de Luxembourg in 1914, is the son of the Reverend Bertram Desmonde of Stillwater Rectory, Sussex, and has recently returned to England. His younger brother, Lieutenant David Desmonde, was killed in action at Vimy Ridge. In this present collection, introduced to Britain under the sponsorship of Richard Glyn, Mr. Desmonde exhibits the fruits of his labors during the war years, which he passed in the comparative tranquillity of the Iberian peninsula. Despite this advantage, we find his landscapes crude, his figure compositions clumsy. In his complete severance from tradition Desmonde has lost sight of the basic principles of proportion, and is entangled in a perverse eccentricity. In brief, we cannot grasp this so-called art and cannot like it."*

Geoffrey flung down the paper. Claire, sitting motionless, with a strained expression, had to curb an almost irresistible impulse to pick it up. The General had risen and, standing with his back to the fire, lit his pipe with a sort of frowning detachment.

"How will they take this at the Rectory?"

"Badly. It's sure to reopen the whole messy business."

"I suppose he'll turn up at home."

"Bound to. He can't have a bean. I knew the fellow would sneak back when the fighting was over."

Claire ventured: "I wonder if the paintings are as bad as they make out."

"Good heavens! Didn't you hear what the chap said about 'em?"

"But there's Glyn," Claire persisted. "A well-known artist. Why should he sponsor Stephen's work if it were rubbish?"

"Because he's hand in glove with my heroic cousin." Geoffrey glared at his wife. "I daresay they fixed this thing up together in some dive in Paris."

"However it was arranged," said the General, "it's a bad thing for the family. When I think of David . . ." He moved toward the door. "If you'll excuse me, Claire, I'll telephone Bertram."

"Do that, Father," Geoffrey agreed, pushing back his chair. "I'll wait for you in the billiard room."

Alone, Claire took up the paper, found the paragraph she sought, read it through. She sighed. She had, in Geoffrey's phrase, written Stephen off long ago. Acknowledging his defects she, like the others, deplored them. Yet she detected in the review of his exhibition a prejudiced judgment of Stephen Desmonde, the man rather than the artist, which made her wish to rise in his defense — at least, she corrected herself, in defense of his work. An impulse, as yet only half formed, was stirring beneath her consciousness.

The following morning she had an appointment in London. Afterward she walked slowly toward the West End, moving with a sort of fatalism toward the Maddox Galleries. She entered quickly, with a fast-beating heart, surprised by the modest appearance and the emptiness of the place. Only two women were present, conversing softly; a somnolent youth in striped trousers and black braided jacket, reading at a desk, seemed the sole guardian of the gallery.

Claire began to look at the paintings, seeing little in the beginning but an audacious contrast of brilliant colors, yet striving to understand them, wishing with all her heart to like them.

One, in particular, an Andalusian landscape, held her for a long time. She could feel the hard brilliance of the light, the sun beating on arid slopes and stunted olive trees. Then she came upon the figure of a ragged old woman with a wooden hoe upon her shoulder. There was in this composition such a fusion of sadness and dignity that it touched Claire to the heart.

As she stood absorbed, a voice addressed her. She swung round, and saw Stephen. The blood rushed from her cheeks.

"Claire! How good of you to come."

He took her hand warmly. He had, she saw through her confusion, become extremely thin, and he had grown a beard, cropped close, which gave his face an almost startling gauntness. Yet he was brown and held himself erect. He had a vital quality which reassured her.

"How little changed you are," he went on. "Let's sit over here, where we can talk. How are the children, and Geoffrey?"

She gave him news of her family, not daring to mention his own people at the Rectory. His manner, direct and friendly, lacking

that youthful shyness which had once tormented him, should have set her at ease. Yet she could not fully regain her composure.

"I suppose you've been round the show," he remarked lightly. "Do tell me what you think of it."

"I like it," she answered awkwardly, like a schoolgirl.

"Don't be afraid to speak your mind. I'm quite hardened."

She flushed. "The critique in the *Post* was so unfair."

"Oh, that was mild. You should see my other notices. *Aboriginal daubs . . . perverted nonsense . . .*" He smiled faintly.

She was affected deeply. Her gaze, downcast, took in his heavy workman's boots, a rough darn on the knee of his corduroys. She exclaimed, involuntarily: "Stephen! It hasn't been easy for you."

"I've been doing the only thing that matters to me."

"But it must be dreadfully discouraging, to meet always with abuse, to be denied success."

"It's the work that matters. Besides, I've had some slight recognition. Two of my paintings are in the Municipal Gallery in The Hague, one in Brussels and another in the Oslo State Museum."

The revelation filled her with pleasure. Her eyes turned to the painting of the old Spanish woman. "I like that, very much."

"Luisa Mendez. After a friend of mine died and I was down to my last peseta she took me in. She had little enough, and she was blind." He added: "I couldn't afford canvas. It's painted on burlap, a piece cut from a potato sack."

"Have you just come from Spain?"

"No. Eighteen months ago. I went to Paris to work with Amédée Modigliani. A fine painter. I was fond of him."

"You say 'was'?"

"He died in January at the Hôpital de la Charité."

What depths of hardship had Stephen not sounded in these years? She could see the marks of it in his face, as though he had escaped despair only by the secret passion that was in him.

She stirred nervously and made a pretense of inspecting her watch. "I must rush for my train. You will be coming to the Rectory, won't you, Stephen?"

"It was a mistake for me to go back before. It would be a worse one now. Besides, they can't possibly want me."

"Oh, I'm sure they do. They have missed you."

"Well," he hesitated, "if I'm asked . . ."

"I'm so glad. We shall see you there then, Stephen. Good-by."

She walked briskly across the Mall toward the station. The protective instinct she had always had toward Stephen, and which, of course, she still might legitimately feel, was rearoused, and in its glow she was happy. In the train, a smile of recollection parted her lips. And suddenly she had an inspiration, which caused her to sit up with a stifled exclamation. How splendid, if it could be done! There would be difficulties, yet surely, oh, surely she could overcome them. At least she would try with all her heart.

Often in his years of absence Stephen's thoughts had turned back toward London. Now he scarcely recognized it. The postwar price of food appalled him, the more so as he had arrived in England with less than three pounds in his pocket. The process of demobilization, still proceeding, produced an air of dislocation. In the West End a restless gaiety prevailed. Nearly a million young Britons had died in the war, another million had been incapacitated. Was it to forget this fact that people flocked to the theaters, restaurants and night clubs?

Only the river remained unchanged, and Stephen spent many hours wandering along the embankments, studying the fluid play of reflections. And one morning, the day before his exhibition closed, he took a bus to Stepney.

The weather was fair when he started off, but as the omnibus drew into Seven Sisters Lane a misty rain blotted out the waterfront. At the Red Lion he got off the bus. The day was killed for painting, but he was on familiar ground. On an impulse, he swung into Clinker Street, mounted the steps of the Settlement and rang the bell. The porter who opened the door gazed at Stephen without recognition.

"Is Mr. Loftus still here?"

"You mean the Reverend Gerald Loftus? On'y last year they made him vicar of St. Barnabas."

"Indeed! I'm glad he's done so well. You don't by chance know of a young woman who used to work here . . . Jenny Baines?"

"Mrs. Baines!" the man answered at once. "Course I do. Lives quite near. Seventeen Cable Street. Had some bad luck in her time. But a nice little woman, and doing all right now."

"Bad luck?"

"She had a kid what died. Then lost her husband. He caught a fever in Australia and was buried at sea."

"Thank you for your information." Stephen turned and went down the steps.

In ten minutes he was walking along the slightly curved row of brick houses on Cable Street, noting the numbers on the fanlights. He was almost opposite Number 17 when the door opened and a woman came out, bareheaded, wearing a mackintosh and carrying a string bag. He would have known her anywhere.

"Jenny," he said. "Don't you remember me?"

She looked at him. Then in a faraway voice she said:

"Mr. Stephen Desmonde."

"Yes, Jenny. You look as though you'd seen a ghost."

"Oh, no, sir. You have changed though — you're thinner." Color flooded back into her face. Still flustered, she added, "I was just going shopping down the street. Come back in the house."

"No, no," he protested. "I'll go along with you."

He took her umbrella and held it over them as they walked along Cable Street. "How long is it since we last met?"

"It must be eight years, yes, eight years and three months."

The exactitude of her reply amused him.

"I sent you a post card once from Paris. Did you ever get it?"

"It's on my kitchen mantelpiece, this minute. The Eiffel Tower. Been much admired."

They were now in the main street and he took her by the elbow and steered her into a tearoom. "We'll have a cup of tea."

"You remember my weakness, sir. I always was a one for tea."

A waitress detached herself from the little group gossiping in the back premises.

"Tea and hot buttered toast for two."

"And see it *is* butter, miss, if you please," Jenny said, adding to Stephen: "They'd give you marge as soon as look at you."

The tea was brought, the toast examined and approved.

"And how have things been with you, Jenny? I was sorry to hear that you are alone now."

"Yes, I've had my troubles. But I never was one to sit and mope. I put Alf's insurance in a nice little house."

"You take lodgers?"

"In a very particular way, sir. I have one regular, old Captain Tapley. Not to mislead you, it was only a barge he had when he retired. But he's nice, sir. Then I have another room I let temporary to ships' officers unloading at the docks. When they're pushed at mission time, I even take a clergyman from the Settlement."

"Good Lord, Jenny. Clergymen. After all they did to you. You're as forgiving and as cheerful as ever."

"Why shouldn't I be, sir? I have my independence. And I'm lucky to have Florrie, Alf's sister. One of the best. She has a tidy little business in Margate. I go down a lot to help her."

"What sort of business?"

"Wet fish."

Her adjective made him smile. "Is there any other kind?"

She laughed. "Wet's what they say in the trade. Not salt and that like. Florrie's mostly in the shrimp line."

Studying her as she sat there, he understood why he had always wanted to paint her. Something in her: a quality of womanhood, the generosity of her wide mouth, that vivid complexion.

"And how about you, sir? You're still at the painting?"

"It's still at me. Got me by the throat. Won't let go."

"Yes," she agreed with practical complaisance. "If you have to do a thing I suppose you have to. Like falling overboard and having to swim for it."

Her dry smile was irresistible. He laughed, and so did she, in a joint fit of laughter. Wiping her eyes, she said, "It is strange to see you in these parts again, Mr. Desmonde. I suppose . . . I suppose you came down to see them at the Settlement."

He shook his head. "I wanted to paint the old Barking wharf."

"Oh!" Her eyes fell. "Those tumble-down old shacks?" She broke off, then asked: "Shall you be stopping in London long?"

"I'm afraid not. I'm leaving in a couple of days."

A silence followed. He took up the check.

She drew a quick breath, then asked, with touching diffidence: 'Won't you come back and meet Cap'n Tapley?"

"Perhaps another time, Jenny. I may be down here again."

"Don't forget to look me up if you come, sir."

At the swing doors they shook hands, then set off in opposite directions. As he reached the street corner something made him turn his head. And she too was looking back. He waved and went on. The mist, thickening to fog, seemed to accentuate his sense of having lost both warmth and companionship.

STEPHEN's exhibition closed on the last day of November. Charles Maddox, owner of the gallery, had undertaken it reluctantly and only after pressure from Richard Glyn but, to his surprise, two pictures were sold to an agent during the final week of the show. He more than covered his expenses, while Stephen, after deduction of commission, received a check for three hundred pounds. This unaccustomed affluence cast a better light upon his prospective visit to Stillwater. A letter, brief but not unkind, had come from his father, inviting him to the Rectory, and he had written to accept. Now, at least, he would not return a beggar.

Early on December 3 he packed his rucksack and entrained for Sussex. He got off at the station before his, so that he might walk cross-country to Stillwater. It was an exquisite winter morning. The pale yellow sun had not yet dispelled the frost which silvered every blade of grass, every hawthorn twig. The air was still, but sharp as cider. In the fields cows moved in the vapor of their own breath. How often in Spain, wandering through the hot olive groves, he had been haunted by the thought of England's drenched meadows and osier-hung brooks.

As he tramped the winding lanes, every step brought back the days when he had scoured these woods and meadows with his brother. That sense of self-reproach which, since he learned of Davie's death, had never quite left him flared up again in his breast. Suddenly, painfully, he seemed stripped of the faith in his own creative powers which usually sustained him, felt himself worthless, his life a weak and wasted essay in futility.

He reached Stillwater village and traversed the cobbled streets.

The place had grown in his absence, a modern note struck by a red-fronted Woolworth's, a cinema with a showy marquee, a large dance hall and a row of red brick bungalows, built on the main road above the lane which gave access to the Rectory. Saddened, he hastened down the lane, into the Rectory grounds. Here, too, he sensed change, a slight neglect.

The side door of the Rectory stood open. The next minute he was in the house. In the kitchen he found Caroline, wearing a stained apron, seated at the table, coring apples.

"Carrie," he exclaimed.

She turned, dropped the coring knife, put out her hands.

"Oh, Stephen, I'm glad you've come. Father has gone to a conference at Charminster. We didn't expect you till evening."

"And Mother?"

"Away. As usual. Let me get you something to eat?"

He shook his head.

"I warn you, lunch won't be much."

At this, moisture formed beneath her lids. He sat down beside her, offered her a red cotton handkerchief. "Tell me."

She unburdened herself. Her troubles could be expressed in a single word — change. She could not hire a decent servant these days. Women, accustomed to munition-factory wages, had lost taste for domestic service. Untrained village girls, pert and careless, came and went in the kitchen. Stephen might have smiled but for Caroline's drawn expression and roughened hands. He kept silent while she resumed: "Money seems to be scarce with Father. We don't work the farm any more. During the war we were all plowed up, it was too much to get the meadows back to grass, especially since we'd lost Mould."

"What! Is the old chap dead?"

"No. Retired . . . by his remarkable son." She continued with a note of bitterness: "I suppose you noticed the new bungalows on the Warren. Albert Mould built them. Made heaps of money. Now he's in politics too. He hates us, and last year he had a violent row with Father over the glebe boundary."

"How is Father?"

"He can't do so much as he used to, but he's perfectly sound.

And of course, like the rest of us, he has his worries." In a subdued tone, Caroline added: "Mother."

Julia's eccentricity, Caroline said, had become a source of real concern. She was often away for weeks at a time. Her hypochondria had progressed, so that from orthodox physicians she had passed to quacks and faith healers. Now she was installed at Shepherd's Bush in the curative establishment of an Eastern mystic who expounded some form of theosophy. She had, of course, her own small income, yet surely this must be inadequate for such a mode of life. She lived in her own dream world, from which the war, Stephen's absence, even Davie's death had not moved her.

At four o'clock in the afternoon the Rector arrived. He greeted Stephen quietly, then led the way into the library where, before a wood fire, Caroline had ready tea and toasted muffins.

"How good to have a fire these wintry days." He held his hands to the blaze which brought out the strain and sadness in his face. This meeting was terrible for him. He longed to take Stephen to his heart; yet, warned by past experience, he dared not. Even his son's appearance, the beard and clothes, and that set expression, like a mask over the face, aroused his apprehensions.

Stephen plunged his hand in the deep pocket of his jacket and produced two wrapped packages which, impelled by something inexplicable within him, he had brought from London. He gave one to his father and the other to Caroline.

"It's nothing much, Father. But I hope you'll like it. Yours too, Carrie."

Carrie was already opening hers and, with an exclamation of pleasure, drew out a brooch of aquamarines and antique gold.

"Oh, Stephen, how lovely."

The Rector unwrapped his gift. It was an illuminated Book of Hours, a prize he had coveted all his life. Speechless, Bertram gazed at his son.

"Don't look at me like that, Father. I assure you it's come by honestly."

"You purchased it?"

"Naturally. I'd been lucky enough to sell two pictures at the exhibition."

"My dear boy . . . someone has actually bought your paintings?" The Rector's eyes filled. This success, even in the field of art, gratified him beyond words. Then, gazing at the gift, he said, in a shaking voice: "I am deeply touched by your thoughtfulness."

Many times that evening, after the brief supper, he took up the little book, turned its vellum pages with a fondling, meditative touch. Could it be that things might come all right in the end? No doubt Stephen had strayed far from the decent ways of his upbringing, behaved deplorably during the war. But he had always been openhearted and generous, and he was older now. Surely at last he must think of settling down.

Hopefully, the Rector studied the prodigal, now just concluding a game of chess with Caroline. How good that he should be playing with his sister and not, as had been feared, seeking distractions in the taverns of Charminster or Brighton.

At bedtime, Stephen stood in his own room, so lit by moonlight he needed no other illumination. He glanced round — at the shelves, still holding his first books, the battered botanical cabinet, his early water colors, and the map he had made of Stillwater parish. He picked up a snapshot of David, playing stump cricket on the lawn. He looked at it steadily, enduring the solemn eyes, the nervous boyish stance. Then, turning with a set face, he threw open his window, braced to the shock of the frosted air.

The Downs lay bathed in moonlight. Through the leafless beeches the crenelated tower of the church rose from the dark yews. This downland was his home, his inheritance, yet he had thrown it willfully away. For what? He thought of the past eight years, the poverty, the disappointments, the work and more work, the wild elations, the ghastly stretches of sterility . . . he closed his eyes, as against pain. No matter how he felt he was in the power of forces that moved to inscrutable and irrevocable ends.

During the days which followed Stephen spent most of his time working in the Rectory garden. On the few occasions when he went to the village he became conscious of some queer looks directed at him. Several times abusive remarks were shouted after him by the gang of youths who habitually stood at the corner out-

side the cinema. And one afternoon a lump of mud flew past his head, accompanied by the taunt, "War hero!"

This was a strange, fallow period for him, but occasionally, after lunch, he walked upon the Downs as far as Chillingham Lake, where he sat upon a stump and filled his sketchbook with studies of ruffled water and stark, wintry trees. Late one afternoon, returning from such an excursion, he came out upon the country road which lay midway between the Rectory and Broughton Court. He became aware through the gathering twilight of a woman, bareheaded, coming toward him. It was Claire.

"I thought I might meet you here!" She smiled. "Caroline told me you were at Chillingham. I walked over on the chance."

They fell into step along the road. A soft mist was rising, faintly mingled with the tang of distant wood smoke.

"Are you happy to be home?"

He nodded. "One can't come back after years abroad without falling in love with England all over again."

"And could you paint here?"

"I could anywhere. The best of the Impressionists painted in the suburbs, in their own back yards."

"This is your back yard, Stephen. Seriously, the Rectory would be such a haven for you."

"I'm too odd a bird ever to roost here again." His voice was hard. "I've broken from the beliefs and prejudices of my class."

"If you stay on, something may turn up to convince you . . ." She broke off, leaving unexplained the inspiration that had come to her in the train, on the day she had been to his exhibition.

In nearby Charminster, a committee under the auspices of the cathedral clergy had recently constructed a handsome Gothic hall to serve as a library and war memorial, a monument dedicated to peace. Suggestions for the decoration of the interior were now being discussed. The vote had fallen upon a series of panels, done in oils on canvas, and framed in Sussex oak. The names of various painters had been suggested but so far nothing had been decided.

And so, on the very day after seeing Stephen at the exhibition, Claire had motored to Charminster to see the Dean of the cathedral, who had been a close friend of her mother.

The Dean was an aged figure, upon whom growing deafness had pressed an increasing withdrawal from all but his most essential duties. He received Claire with affection, listened with cupped ear to the case which she diplomatically presented. Perhaps Stephen's name evoked a dubious echo, but it was quickly lost in the Dean's benign senescence and the desire to resume his nap. Besides, who had more claim to suggest a candidate than the daughter of Lady Broughton? And the Reverend Bertram was a worthy worker in the vineyard. The Dean, patting her hand, promised to discuss the matter with the chairman of the committee.

Surely she had done enough. Yet on her way home Claire called on Rear Admiral Tryng, the chairman, and on her bank manager, Mark Sutton, another important committee member, both of whom, perhaps flattered by her confidence and reassured by mention of her visit to the Dean, agreed to support her nominee.

How simple it had all been. She felt a glow of accomplishment. Ten days had passed; then, this afternoon, Admiral Tryng had telephoned her. Desmonde was to be interviewed by the committee and subject to its approval would receive the appointment.

She must tell Stephen at once. And here she was, walking by his side, yet unable to speak one word of her momentous news. It was twilight when they reached the gates of Broughton Court, and here Stephen paused. "I shan't come any farther, Claire."

"Won't you?" She hesitated. "Geoffrey's been in town today . . . but he should be back quite soon."

Stephen shook his head.

"Good night then, Stephen," she murmured. "Remember that I have faith in you. The tide may turn, sooner than you think."

An hour later, Stephen arrived at the Rectory.

"At last!" Caroline greeted him excitedly. "I thought you'd never come. Father wants to see you right away."

As Stephen entered the library, the Rector took him by the hand. "My dear boy, today in Charminster, I was given great and wholly unexpected news. You are being considered, and may well be chosen, to paint the panels of the new Memorial."

On the following day, at three o'clock, the four members of the Memorial committee — Rear Admiral Tryng, Mark Sutton, Joseph Cordley, a church warden and merchant, and Arnold Sharp, the Charminster solicitor, assembled in a small office of the chancellery, and Stephen was summoned before them. The Dean was not present.

Tryng, the chairman, cast a searching glance upon Stephen as he entered, and was relieved. He did not care much for the close-cropped hair and beard nor that independent air, but the fellow looked a gentleman.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Desmonde. Won't you take a chair? We

needn't beat about the bush. We want five panels, approximately six feet by four, which will suitably express the heroic yet tragic purpose for which this building stands."

"I should certainly do my best."

Stephen took a guarded look at the four men seated behind the long table and recognized immediately that two were favorable to him and two opposed. Of these latter, one was Arnold Sharp, a thin, bleak-looking man, and the other was red-faced Joe Cordley.

"I suppose you have brought samples of your work to show the committee?" Sharp said.

"I'm afraid not. Most of my recent paintings are in the hands of my London agent. I'll gladly have several sent down."

"I think," Tryng cut in, "I can vouch for Mr. Desmonde's competence. And so will the Dean."

"But is he competent for this particular task," the solicitor demurred, "dealing as it does with the recent war?"

Sharp's neighbor, Joe Cordley, cocked his blunt face toward Stephen. "You wasn't in the war, Mr. Desmonde?"

"No. I was abroad."

"Ah!" Cordley let his bulk sink back in his chair. "Abroad . . . but not in the trenches."

"I believe," Sharp was speaking again, "your young brother was killed in action, wasn't he?"

"Yes." Stephen compressed his lips. He had come eager to obtain the commission; now in face of this hostile interrogation his determination hardened. "While I took no part in the war, I have, perhaps because of this, ideas which might qualify me for this particular work. It seems to me that these panels should not only stand as a tribute to those who gave their lives but, through stressing the tragedy of war, the element of sacrifice and suffering, should help, perhaps, to prevent another world calamity."

"Bravo, Mr. Desmonde," Tryng said heartily. He liked the speech and the way Stephen looked straight at Sharp. Pity the fellow was such a deuced funk! — but there, once in a while, even the best families would turn out a white rabbit. "And now about dates."

"Would you be prepared," Sharp interrupted, "to submit designs for our approval?"

"That is quite contrary to the usual procedure. I will submit designs if you insist but, since this represents the most difficult half of the work, only if you commission me beforehand."

"We've no time to waste on that." Tryng spoke definitely. "Not with the official opening in three months. Could you complete the work by then?"

"I think so. When I'm interested I work very quickly."

"Good. The fee we propose is five hundred guineas."

"Payment on delivery," Sharp said sourly.

"I accept your conditions," Stephen said. "I should however like to work in the hall itself. I have no studio here."

"I think that can be allowed. We'll get you the key." Tryng paused. "That's all then, gentlemen. I congratulate you, Mr. Desmonde. And I know you will give us a magnificent job of work."

STEPHEN walked directly to the new building, which stood not far from the cathedral close. He was immediately impressed by the simplicity and purity of its design; and the interior, in shape a pentagon, with plain, unbroken, whitewashed walls, was superb for his plans. How his colors would burn and glow against that dead-white background and how perfect was the spacing of these five identical walls. For a long time he remained in the empty hall, squatting on one knee, oblivious to everything but the forms that were already swirling into the screen of his sight.

For several days he refrained from starting work. He wanted to reflect deeply on this subject, so painfully near his heart. The loss of his brother, all the arid hardships of his years in Spain shaped his thoughts. Within him stirred the revolt of a wounded spirit against the eternal tragedy of human violence.

When he began to paint he was more and more carried away by his burning desire to express not only the heroism but also the dreadful waste of war, so that, if the world might only look upon his pictures, it might never yield to such madness again. He often did not leave the hall from early morning until the light failed him in the evening. At night he returned to the Rectory, exhausted, but with a sense of accomplishment.

For the Rector, who had pictured artists as indolent bohemians,

this Spartan application was not only a staggering surprise but a source of satisfaction. His son was at home, leading a regular life, working at a project connected with the cathedral. To what might not this lead in the end!

There had been a markedly unfavorable reaction — he was forced to admit — when the news of Stephen's appointment was made public. Several damaging letters had appeared in the local press. Worried, the Rector had consulted with Caroline.

"The attacks are cruel." Bertram's brows were drawn in a harassed frown. "Most vicious. And unfortunately true."

"But quite unfair, Father. Why all this about Stephen's not being in the army? He should be judged as an artist."

"At the same time, for a war memorial . . . there's justice in the idea that they might have chosen an ex-serviceman."

"Who might have been a very poor painter. His friend, Richard Glyn, who has shown at the Royal Academy, came down the other day. Stephen showed what he had already done, and Glyn was quite carried away."

The Rector looked pleased. "If he makes a success of this, it might reopen for him a true spiritual field, church decoration, stained-glass windows and the like. Who knows but that one day under such influence he might even yet take orders?" He broke off, rose and reached for his hat. From the window she watched him go up the lane, a long black figure, under the flat shovel hat. She knew he was going to the church to pray.

Chapter Eleven

Among the many excellent and decided qualities which characterized General Desmonde's wife, sweetness of temper was less obvious than the rest. She had been brought up in a military atmosphere, toasted in her maidenhood as the daughter of the regiment, and married to a general. All this had intensified her capacity to rule. This January morning there was a tightness of the lips, a dilation of the nostrils which boded little good for anyone who might cross her. Seated at her walnut bureau, her admirable

figure taut in tweed and jumper, she gazed at the blotter before her.

What should she do? How . . . how should she act?

Some weeks before, she had called at Broughton Court to see Claire. Finding that her daughter-in-law had gone for a walk, she sat down in the drawing room to wait, and, from the windows, caught a glimpse of Stephen and Claire returning together from the lonely country lane outside the Court walls. How close they had stood together! With Geoffrey absent, and with Stephen's notorious reputation, it was most alarming.

In fairness, the General's lady acknowledged that Claire was of irreproachable character. Yet the recollection of her youthful predilection for Stephen was not easily dismissed. And even more alarming were the events of the previous evening — she and the General had been out to dinner and on her left at the table had been Reginald Tryng. She had at first failed to understand his genial reference to Claire. Then, stung to attention, she listened while he related his diplomacy in managing to get the Memorial commission for Stephen as Claire had asked him to. It was, he concluded, extremely handsome of Claire to put herself out for Geoffrey's cousin Stephen!

The Rear Admiral brought to a head all of Adelaide's suspicions. Claire, interesting herself surreptitiously in this cad. It must be stopped before it became a scandal in the county. Today, she knew, Claire was in London. With sudden decision she went to the telephone and asked Geoffrey to come for tea.

He came about four o'clock, having nothing else to do. Adelaide fed him well; then, while he stretched his legs before a glowing fire, she led the conversation to the next meet of the hounds. Time passed agreeably for Geoffrey in the sound of his own voice. When the clock struck six he heaved himself out of his chair.

"Jolly decent tea, Mater. Quite enjoyed our little powwow."

"I, too, Geoffrey." She accompanied him to the hall. "By the way, I hear that your cousin is at the Rectory."

"Yes, worse luck. I shan't have anything to do with him."

"That's wise, Geoffrey. And I should warn Claire to keep out of his way if I were you."

"What d'you mean?"

"You know you cut him out with Claire. It must rankle frightfully. And after these years in the lowest haunts in Paris, he's not to be trusted. Do set my mind at rest and say a word to her."

"Oh, very well. Good night, Mater."

She stood at the open door as, with a crunch of wheels on gravel, he shot off down the drive. Then, well satisfied with her afternoon's work, she turned back into the house.

Geoffrey, though not very intelligent, had a sharp awareness of what he called "a put-up job." He kept asking himself, "What was the old girl after?" So his reaction to his mother's advice was a decision not to speak to Claire but to remain mum and investigate the situation.

When he got home Claire had not yet returned from London. Upstairs he paused outside her small sitting room and went in. He went directly to her desk and began systematically to search it. There was nothing that was not innocent; there were even early snapshots of himself as a cadet at Sandhurst.

Half ashamed, he was about to go when, in the top drawer, he uncovered a single folded sheet. It was a bill for four hundred pounds, receipted, from the Maddox Galleries, for two paintings: *Charity* and *Noon in the Olive Grove* by Stephen Desmonde.

On an afternoon in early March the monthly meeting of the West Sussex District Council was droning to an end. Among the fourteen members present Albert Mould sat unusually silent, gnawing at a thumbnail, his seal-like head sunk in his upturned coat collar. As the committee began to disperse, Mould, with his friend Joe Cordley at his elbow, stationed himself by the door and, as Rear Admiral Tryng approached, buttonholed him.

"I'd like a word with you, sir. A most unpleasant duty. It's about them panels for the Memorial Hall."

"Well, what about them?" snapped Tryng, looking at his watch.

"Just this, sir. It's pretty near three months now since them paintings were started and nobody 'as been allowed to see them, the panels being kept under lock and key. Well, sir, that didn't seem right and proper — at least not to two members of your sub-

committee. So, they asked me to accompany them to inspect the pictures. Mr. Arnold Sharp 'ad me get a duplicate key."

Tryng stared his displeasure.

"Well, sir, we got into the 'all yesterday evening. And it's my painful duty to tell you we did not like wot we saw."

"Come now, Mould. You're no judge of art."

"But it ain't only my judgment, poor though that may be. Lawyer Sharp and Joe Cordley 'as the same opinion."

"That we 'as," said Cordley with decision. "I'll take my Bible oath. If it was me was chairman, I'd 'ave a look at them."

Tryng felt a twinge of concern. "You have your key, Mould?"

"We 'ave, sir. And Joe and me are both free now."

"Let us go then."

They took to the road in the Admiral's car. At Charminster, on Mould's suggestion, they picked up Sharp and Sutton. Darkness had fallen when Mould admitted the five men into the Memorial. The hall was empty — Stephen had left an hour before. Cordley switched on the lights. And there, before them, were the panels.

The first to attract Tryng's eye was that named by Stephen *Offering to Peace:* a young woman holding out an infant against a background of golden wheat fields and fruitful countryside, richly peopled with cheerful rustic figures. He was conscious of a warm flow of relief. Why, the thing was good, he really liked it. But when he turned to the second panel, *Hail, Armageddon,* with its deadly massing of guns, and uniformed men, while crowds cheered, bands played and flags were waved under a darkening sky, his misgivings were sharply reawakened. With sickening apprehension, he scanned the third canvas, *The Rape of Peace,* and the fourth, *Aftermath,* which portrayed on the one hand the dreadful incidents of war, on the other its frightful consequences — famine, pestilence, violence and ruin, the whole surveyed by the nude, weeping figure of a woman. The final panel, *Resurrection of the Slain,* made his eyes start from his head. Strange, human forms, disfigured, unclothed, were bursting out of their graves beneath a wildly trumpeting angelic host.

And it was he, Rear Admiral Reginald Tryng, who had sponsored Desmonde. He squared his shoulders.

"Well, gentlemen, this is most regrettable. I must see the Dean at once. I shall call a meeting for tomorrow. Nine o'clock sharp. I'll have Desmonde there. In the meantime kindly refrain from public comment. Good night."

On the following morning, Stephen came before the committee. He was in excellent spirits. His work was almost finished and he knew that it was good. Soon he would show the panels to the committee, who doubtless wished to ask him about that very matter.

"Mr. Desmonde," Tryng said abruptly, "I must inform you that we have seen your paintings. We are profoundly shocked by them."

The unexpectedness of the attack caught Stephen off guard. He started, then stood there, very pale, his eyes grown somber and hard. Before he could speak Tryng continued: "Instead of something noble and heroic, you have given us a portrayal of human suffering that is morbid and degrading."

"You seemed to approve my ideas before I began."

"No one in his senses could approve those panels."

"Are you competent to judge?"

"You thought us competent enough when we engaged you. The committee cannot accept your paintings. To make them presentable would require complete repainting. Will you do this?"

"No, I won't," Stephen answered. "It's absurd of you to ask it."

"In that case I must ask you to desist from further work upon the panels. Your engagement is canceled."

"I'd like to put on record," Sharp said, "that under the terms of the agreement no payment is due."

Stephen remained completely still, struggling with his inner tumult. Then without a word, he swung round and left the room.

His steps led him instinctively to the Memorial. He was determined, despite the injunction laid upon him, to finish the panels. By a fortunate omission they had not made him give up his key.

But when he arrived at the building, he found the door secured by a bar and padlock. He turned away. Through the town he went, all unseeing, out upon the Downs, where, striding forward, a dark and lonely figure against the skyline, he seemed to defy the universe that stood arrayed against him.

That afternoon, the committee announced that the panels had not attained the requisite standard and were therefore unacceptable. To Adelaide, this brought a pleasurable sense of vindication. Geoffrey, nursing his grievance, experienced a moody satisfaction intensified by a rumor that Stephen had disappeared. No doubt the blighter was lying dead drunk in a pub!

Three days later, on the Thursday evening of that same unhappy week, Caroline entered the library at Stillwater. The Rector sat in his usual chair, staring into the fire. For a moment she stood, hesitant. "I wondered, Father . . . if I should lock up."

"There is still no sign of him?"

"No, Father. And it is almost eleven."

"Leave everything as it is. And be off to bed. You must be very weary. Good night, Carrie."

Reluctantly, Caroline went upstairs to her chilly bedroom while Bertram, erect in his chair, waited for his son. Slowly the minutes dragged on; at midnight the last ember of the fire flickered and died. Useless to wait longer. The Rector slowly mounted the stairs.

The following afternoon, when Caroline was resting in her room while Bertram was out on a parochial call, the sound of footsteps, brisk, familiar, drew her to the window. It was Stephen. Quickly she threw on her old pink dressing gown, met him as he came into the house.

"Get me something to eat, Carrie, there's a dear. As soon as you can. I'm starving."

"Where have you been?" Her voice held an accusing note. "We've been worried about you. Where did you sleep?"

He smiled. "My natural habitat. Ground level. And in my clothes. I'm going up for a wash and a change."

She sighed, relieved to see him, yet full of misgiving. But she made him bacon and eggs and brewed a pot of strong tea. As he ate and drank he parried all her questions, then, relenting, sat back in his chair and explained. "It's really quite simple, Carrie. I had to finish my paintings. And as they'd locked me out, I broke in."

"And you've been in the Memorial all this time? With nothing to eat and sleeping on the floor?"

"I assure you, dear Carrie, that didn't bother me in the least." His

voice hardened. "I wanted to get my work done. And now it is, varnished and complete." He glanced at the clock. "I must be off."

"Oh, no, Stephen! Father will want to see you."

"I shall be back, quite early," he assured her. "Certainly before ten. I promise you."

There was something behind his words which she could not comprehend. The next minute he had left the house as abruptly as he had appeared. At the end of the lane, the Rural District bus loomed up. Stephen hailed it and took his seat as it moved off in the direction of Charminster.

All the stubbornness in his character had risen against the treatment meted out to him. He was convinced that the panels were of the highest quality. That they should have been dismissed without recourse to expert opinion made his blood surge. Worst of all was the manner in which the committee had impounded his work, for which they had paid nothing. He would not submit. Carefully, he went over the arrangements he had made.

He got off the bus in Charminster, and walked rapidly to the railway station. He reached the main platform just as the six o'clock train from London drew in. Young Thorpe Maddox, his London agent's nephew, descended.

"Good of you to come," Stephen said, as they shook hands.

"Only too glad to help, Mr. Desmonde. Uncle sent his regards."

"I'm putting you up at the Blue Boar," Stephen said as they walked toward the station exit. "But first we have work to do."

In the center of Charminster, just off Market Street, there was a shop, originally a stationer's known as Langlands which, through a succession of failures, had become a local "let-out" on short-term leases for Boy Scout rallies and charity sales. Opposite this establishment Stephen stopped.

"This is the place I've rented. Not much. But good wall space, and a desk and chair for you. Come round the back way. There's a handcart in the yard."

Five minutes later, pushing the handcart between them through the almost deserted streets, they trundled off to the Memorial. In less than twenty minutes they had transferred Stephen's panels from the building to the barrow, where he covered them with a

strip of sacking. Back at the Langlands establishment, he and Maddox unloaded the cargo, carried it into the shop. After drawing the blinds they set the *Rape of Peace* panel in the front window, the *Armageddon* directly opposite the entrance. The remaining three panels were hung in the main room of the shop.

Stephen turned to his companion. "Well, what's the verdict?"

"You know I've always been keen about your work, Mr. Desmonde. I'll swear these surpass anything you've done. They are tremendous."

"Then you won't mind sitting with them for a couple of weeks?"

"I'd say not." Young Maddox paused. "Uncle hasn't seen them?"

"No. Why do you ask?"

"I'm just wondering, Mr. Desmonde, whether he would think you wise in exhibiting them in Charminster."

"It's in Charminster I must show them. And why not?"

"Well, sir . . . this is a small, backward sort of place. I'll bet they don't know a work of art from a turnip. If these panels were in the National Gallery or the Louvre, people would take them at their worth. But what on earth will they think of them down here?"

NEXT MORNING at nine o'clock, Thorpe Maddox opened the shop, placing the panels on public display. Almost at the same moment the bank manager, Mark Sutton, came along Market Street on his way to work. He saw the great painting in the window, recognized it, and almost had a fit. Four minutes later he was in his office telephoning to Tryng. The Admiral declared helplessly that he washed his hands of the whole affair.

"Of course they are his own paintings. He is entitled to take them. Otherwise I'd have burned the lot long ago. The cursed paintings will cause a bigger commotion in Charminster than anything since the fire in Bailey's brewery."

In the ordinary way an exhibition of paintings would have had slight impact on the life of this country town. But the sequence of events, linked to the reputation of the artist, enwrapped the panels in a horrid fascination. All Charminster went to view them, as a crowd might gather at a morgue.

The reaction of the citizens was one of stupefaction. They were

scandalized. The paintings seemed to violate all decencies of patriotism, religion and morality. Civic conscience was aroused, and the local press went into action. In the *Chronicle* an editorial appeared, its caption: *Salacious Art.*

Admiral Tryng, feeling his confidence had been betrayed by Stephen, was conscious, as the storm grew, of a sense of compunction toward Claire, who was also a victim in the affair. One day, alarmed by a word let drop by Sharp, the town solicitor, he took up the telephone, got through to Broughton Court.

"Hello, hello. Admiral Tryng. Might I speak to Mrs. Desmonde."

"I'm afraid my wife is engaged at present."

"Oh, it's you, Geoffrey. Nice to hear your voice, my dear fellow. In the light of something I heard today, it's imperative your cousin close the exhibition and clear out with his confounded daubs, without delay. I don't wish to say more over the telephone but you get my meaning. . . ."

"I think I do."

"Good. I quite realize that when your wife asked me to get your cousin the job she had no idea what we were in for, poor girl."

A silence.

"Well . . . Good-by, Geoffrey, and good luck."

Geoffrey came away from the telephone white with rage. His suspicions had never envisaged anything so damaging to his self-esteem. With an expression carefully blank, he went up to his wife's sitting room. Claire was sitting idly by the window, an open book on her knee.

"What's this you've got?" He took up the book: *The Post-Impressionists.* "Ha! You've shown quite an interest in art lately! By the way, when are we to see your new pictures?"

"What pictures?"

"The two you purchased in London. Don't you remember?"

Knowing that he was baiting her, she forced herself to look at him. "They are being kept for me at present."

His tone hardened. "Why did you subsidize that fellow?"

"I liked the paintings."

"I don't believe it. The blighter can't paint. Yet you flung away

four hundred on him, when we need every penny we've got for the upkeep of the place. And not content with that," the angry words came with a rush, "you cadged around to get him this Memorial job, which of course he botched, making you the talk of the county. Why the devil did you do it?"

"I wished to help him," she answered in a low voice.

"Have you been seeing him?"

"Only once . . . for a few minutes in the road."

"I don't believe you. You're carrying on with him."

"No, Geoffrey."

He glared at her. "I suppose you encouraged him to set up this damned exhibition."

"I did not encourage him. But I can understand why he did it. If an artist believes in his work he must stand up for it. When Manet, Gauguin and Van Gogh and the other modern French painters exhibited their early works, there was a dreadful outcry. And now these pictures are acknowledged masterpieces."

Her quiet tone infuriated him. He gripped her arm.

"Masterpieces! When I get my hands on your precious genius, I'll break his neck."

"Would that help?" Her eyes, resting on him with a strange look, made him relinquish his grasp.

"So you're in love with him."

She got up and moved slowly toward the door. Inexpressibly goaded, he called out: "What you need is a good beating." She gave no sign of having heard.

Alone, Geoffrey stood with clenched fists, his face dark with anger. Something must be done if the name of Desmonde were not to be dragged farther in the mud. Going to the telephone, he called Simla Lodge.

His father answered. "I was on the point of ringing you, Geoffrey. That fellow's exhibition is already closed. The Chief Constable of the county called on me after lunch. He was quite apologetic about proceeding against a member of our family, but he felt that they had no other course than to confiscate these 'works of art.' He also indicated that he would do his best to spare your wife the worst of the publicity."

"What publicity?"

"Your cousin," said General Desmonde, "was taken this morning to the Charminster police station and formally charged with exhibiting an obscene picture. As this is a serious offense against public morals," the General's voice was hard as stone, "he will be tried in open court at the next County Sessions."

THE Charminster police court was filled to the point of suffocation. To Stephen, standing in the dock with a kind of sick impatience, a stolid sergeant beside him, it seemed as if he were enclosed by a wall of misty faces. He knew, thank heaven, that none of his own family was present, but Richard Glyn was there, and the knowledge gave him a sense of support.

Suddenly, the magistrate entered, and took his seat on the bench. Stephen felt his nerves quiver as the Chief Constable, in a singsong voice, began to read from the paper in his hand.

"May it please your Honor, the charge is made under Section One of the Obscene Publications Act and relates to pictures seized on March seventeenth, on premises situated at Five Cornmarket Street in the city of Charminster. The accused was at that time the lessor of these premises and held there an exhibition of the said pictures. Owing to the large number of complaints received by myself, as Commissioner, Sergeant Elkins was instructed to go to the exhibition and report to me. The sergeant saw exhibited five large paintings in oils purporting to be painted by the accused Stephen Sieur Desmonde. On the report of the sergeant a search warrant was applied for and executed on the same day. Three of the oil paintings were seized for production in court and a charge professed forthwith against the aforesaid Stephen Sieur Desmonde."

Arnold Sharp, the solicitor to the City Council, then rose to address the bench. "Your Honor," he began, in a subdued tone, "I need not say with what distress I undertake this task, but in my position I have no alternative. I shall not dwell at length upon the nature of these pictures. Nevertheless I am obliged to indicate the essential features which have led this charge to be professed." Taking up a pointer he stepped forward, tapped one of the panels

and launched into an examination of what he called the "decadence, indecency and malice" of the paintings.

He concluded, "I submit, your Honor, that these productions are obscene, that they should be destroyed and their perpetrator punished to the full extent of the law." Then he sat down amid a murmur of applause, quickly suppressed.

The magistrate directed his gaze toward Stephen. He was a fair-minded, conscientious man, and his tone was moderate and helpful as he said:

"You have, I understand, refused legal aid and propose to conduct your defense yourself. Be good enough to proceed."

With a peculiar tightness at the back of his throat and a heavy thumping about the heart, Stephen faced the magistrate.

"In the first place I wish to deny the charge of obscenity that has been brought against me. The purpose of these panels was to symbolize, on the grand scale, one of the greatest tragedies affecting mankind. And I must submit, with due respect, that a police sergeant is not competent to appraise new movements in the arts. In support of my case for the panels, I propose to call Mr. Richard Glyn, an exhibitor at the Royal Academy, who is now in court."

Immediately, Sharp jumped up. "Your Honor, I protest."

The magistrate nodded. "The calling of evidence on purely artistic grounds is inadmissable. The most beautiful picture in the world could be obscene."

At this point a massive figure rose from the front row of the gallery and leaned over the rail, chin thrust pugnaciously forward above the knotted red scarf. "If I am not to be called, at least I will be heard."

"Silence in court."

"In my opinion these panels are esthetic creations of the first rank. Only a vulgar and dirty mind could regard them as indecent."

"Officer, remove that man."

"I'm going," said Glyn, moving up to the door. "If I stay, I'll say something obscene." He went out.

The sensation produced by this outburst lasted for several minutes. When it subsided the magistrate turned again to Stephen. "Will you continue?"

"If I am not permitted to call witnesses in support of my contention I can only repeat it."

Sharp got to his feet. "Your Honor," he addressed the bench, "I should like to get from the accused a reply as to why he depicted such explicit and shocking atrocities."

"Will you answer, sir."

"Because I wished to emphasize the brutalities that are inseparable from war yet are glossed over or glorified in the name of patriotism."

"You blame such enormities on our own men?"

"Are they different from other men? Is it always the enemy who is the butcher and the barbarian?"

"Your Honor," exclaimed Sharp, "it is well known that the accused did not get near the enemy. I will not further impose his war, or should I say peace, record upon the court. However, I will ask him this." He turned to Stephen. "What right have you to impose such horrors on our quiet, God-fearing community?"

"I wanted to shock people into a permanent resistance to war. I regret nothing that I have done. I would do it all over again."

Sharp smiled grimly. "Your Honor, I will leave you with that unrepentant statement from the accused."

He resumed his seat amid applause which was immediately suppressed. The magistrate, in a manner now far from sympathetic, looked at Stephen. "Have you anything more to say?"

"There is much that I could say. But it would be futile."

Suddenly exhausted, he started to sit down; but the sergeant, with a tap on the shoulder, indicated that he must stand. There was a dead silence as the magistrate began his summing up of the case.

"I have," he said, "listened with attention to the arguments put before me. I have also studied the pictorial evidence with care. Instead of falling in with the wishes of his sponsors and the decent people of this city, the accused willfully set out to shock and revolt; and he succeeded. In attitude, he has been defiant. I have the most acute sympathy for his family. Nevertheless, the fact remains that in delineating and exhibiting nudity as he has done, the accused has contravened Section One of the Obscenity Act. I therefore find

you, Stephen Sieur Desmonde, guilty of the charge brought against you. Under the act I have power to impose a fine of one hundred pounds and a term of imprisonment of six months but I am reluctant to do so. I therefore fine you the sum of fifty pounds. In addition you will pay the costs of the prosecution. Furthermore, I order the three panels here displayed to be burned."

Having delivered this judgment the magistrate rose and, amid tumultuous applause, the court recessed.

Chapter Twelve

When he left the police office Stephen went directly to the station. In the fury and despair that filled his soul his one desire was to lose himself in some place where he would be unknown. Never would he return to Stillwater.

As he made his way toward the ticket window, he felt a light touch upon his arm. He spun round. It was Claire, her face pale, her eyes luminous. She spoke hurriedly.

"Stephen . . . I thought I should find you here." She was striving to sound calm. "Sit down for a moment. You must be dead tired."

He went with her to a bench. "You were there?"

"Did you imagine I could have stayed away? Oh, Stephen, it was all so stupid and cruel. I longed to be able to help you."

"Haven't you helped me too much already? From the beginning . . . when you bought my pictures."

"So Geoffrey came over and told you?"

"It was part of our interview. Before he knocked me down. He indicated that you'd done it out of charity."

She spoke passionately. "I liked the pictures."

"No, Claire. Let's stop pretending. You simply made me a present of three hundred pounds. How could you like the pictures when you admitted you didn't understand them?"

"But I do," she protested, a little wildly. "I've read books, tried to educate myself in art. I do know what you're striving after, and what you have to contend with in the way of ignorance and prejudice. That's why I suffered so much for you today."

"Yes, they had their fun." His lips drew together. "What really hurts is the loss of my work. They'll burn my panels."

"Never mind. You'll go on painting."

"Yes, I'm not finished, though I am clearing out like a beaten dog. But I swear to heaven I'll never give anyone the chance to do this to me again."

She drew a sharp breath as though summoning all her strength. "Stephen . . . take me with you."

He turned his head and looked at her. He saw that her eyes were filled with tears. He was shocked by her pallor.

"Don't, Claire. You've been compromised enough."

She caught hold of his hand. "Oh, Stephen, I'm so unhappy. I should never have married Geoffrey. I never loved him."

The wild abandon in her tone, the intensity of her feeling startled him. And, in his mood of savage bitterness, he was tempted to accept this offering of herself. He had suffered an almost mortal wound, why should he not strike back? He did not love Claire, but she was a sweet and agreeable companion. They could travel the world together, he could paint to his heart's content.

But almost before the thought was born it died.

"You're sorry for me, Claire." He spoke somberly. "Pity is a dangerous emotion. But I'm too fond of you to let you wreck your life. I'm not your kind. After six months of me you'd be miserable."

"I'd be happy . . . just being with you."

"No love could survive the kind of life you'd have to lead with me . . . poor lodgings, hardships you've never dreamed of."

"I have the means to make you happy and comfortable."

"That would be the certain death of my art. And if you killed that, Claire, I could only hate you."

There was a quivering silence. Huddled there, on the bare waiting-room seat, she had the look of a wounded bird, broken and pitiful. He broke the long silence, stroking her sleeve.

"One of these days you'll thank me."

"I wonder," she said, in a queer, far-off tone.

The bells of the cathedral began to peal for evensong, the chimes coming soft and clear. Sighing, she got up and, moving like a woman in a dream, went out of the waiting room.

He sat a long time after she had gone, crushed by sadness. Then, as the sound of a train broke into his painful meditation, he rose and hastened toward the opposite platform. Heedless of the train's destination he swung on and flung himself into an empty compartment. Now, wave after wave of wretchedness assailed him. Would he ever meet anything but neglect and brutal misinterpretation? He stole a dazed and fascinated glance through the window. In this section the embankment ran high, above a sheer seventy-foot drop. Quickly, with a shudder, he looked away.

What then was he to do? Clear out of England altogether? No. After the tension of the past weeks, he felt physically unable to face the pinchbeck shifts of a further European adventure. I'm not well, he thought, with a stab of realization. If only he could find a quiet room where he might rest. He must be hidden and alone.

The train was bound for London — a local. He recollected his meeting with Jenny Baines. Had she not told him she had a room to let? No one would ever dream of looking for him there.

At Victoria Station he came down the platform and boarded an omnibus. An hour later, he was standing on the doorstep of Number 17 Cable Street. He raised his hand to the brightly polished knocker, feeling, with deepening exhaustion, that if this should fail he scarcely knew where to turn.

The door opened and, framed against the yellow gaslight, Jenny stood before him.

"Good evening." How difficult it was to make his words sound casual. "I wondered if you had a vacant room."

She had been peering at his shadowed figure with doubt but now she gave an exclamation full of warmth.

"Mr. Desmonde! Well, I declare! Do come in, sir."

She shut the door behind him and faced him in the warm little passage with its checkered wallpaper and antlered hatstand. "It's odd, sir, but since we had our chat in the tearoom I felt in my bones you might want to come painting Stepney way again."

"So you have a room?"

"That I do, sir. Old Mr. Tapley has the downstairs front. But my upstairs back is vacant. Would you care to have a look?"

"Yes, please."

The back bed-sitting room was neat and decently habitable.

"There isn't a deal of space," she remarked, "but it's cozy and clean. I never could bear dirt, Mr. Desmonde."

"It's very nice indeed. I'll take it, if I may."

"Would you want board, sir? The room would be ten shillings without and a pound with."

"I think with board."

"Very good, sir. Now I'll just pop out for something tasty for your supper. Would you fancy a nice breaded veal cutlet?"

"Yes . . . anything, thank you." Shaken by a sudden chill and a stitch in his side, Stephen all at once felt so queer he had to steady himself against the wall.

When she had gone he sat down heavily in the armchair. This tightness in his chest he recognized as the old bronchial trouble. Perhaps if he had more air it might help his shortness of breath. He rose and went to open the window. The sash was slightly warped and, as he strained to tug it upward, a salty warmth, fluid and familiar, came into his mouth. He pressed a handkerchief to his lips, already knowing what to expect. Oh Lord, he thought, not that, again!

At last the hemorrhage was over. He straightened, took a careful breath. His head felt empty, light as air; his feet were heavy. If only he could close and lock the door and get to bed — he could refuse supper on some pretext — then no one need know of this mishap. In the morning he would be recovered. He must not be ill here. Holding himself together, he stretched out his hand toward the door knob. Everything wavered, whirled in a dazzling arc and retreated, leaving only a black void into which he fell, noiselessly, as though slipping into the well of soft eternal night.

When he came to himself, he became aware that he was in bed, undressed, with a warm stone jar at his feet. And gradually there took shape before him the forms of Jenny Baines and an old man in a striped shirt and braces.

His gaze turned to Jenny. "I think I must have fainted."

"I should think you did, sir. If I hadn't had Mr. Tapley by me, I don't know how I should have got you to bed. I'm just wondering if you shouldn't have the doctor."

"No, no. I'll be perfectly all right. Sorry to have been such a nuisance. If I could just have some milk, please, Jenny."

"That you can, sir. And I'll start some beef tea for you."

They both left him, but in three minutes Jenny was back with a small japanned tray, on which stood a tumbler and a flowered jug. Placing the tray at his bedside she poured him a glass of milk, watched him while he slowly sipped it.

"Shall I leave the light?"

"No. Turn it off, please. Good night, Jenny."

"Good night, sir."

The light was off, the room in darkness, but he still sensed her presence. Then, in a low voice, she said, "You're no trouble, Mr. Desmonde. Don't even think it. You were very good to me, at Clinker Street, and I'm glad to have the chance to pay you back."

The door closed behind her. He lay there, flat on his back in the strange little room, and two tears welled from his shut eyelids and rolled slowly down his cheeks.

ALMOST a week passed before Stephen was able to leave his room. Through the apathy which bound him, he again blessed the chance that had brought him to this house. Jenny had always the untroubled face of one untouched by moods or depressions. Ignoring his embarrassed protestations, she was bent on doing everything within her power to serve him. Every afternoon Joe Tapley came to visit him. Old Joe had worked most of his life on the Thames, for many years as part owner of a coal barge. Now he had retired, invested his savings in a small wharf where he let out moorings, and maintained a skiff for hire.

On Stephen's first day downstairs he tried his legs with a short afternoon walk. When he came back, the captain had returned from the river. His door stood open, and he called Stephen to his room. Seated by the window, darning a sock, was Jenny.

"Well," Joe said, "how does it feel when you're out?"

"Pretty well, thank you. A trifle shaky."

"You've had a shake, all right. Take a chair."

Stephen sat down, glanced from the one to the other, sensing a disturbing air of complicity. Jenny broke the silence.

"I have to go to my sister-in-law in Margate for a couple of weeks, Mr. Desmonde — Florrie Baines, you know, my poor Alf was her brother. I always do this time of year while she's setting up her fish stall. And Mr. Tapley thinks you didn't ought to stop here. He tends for himself when I'm away. But it's different with you. Being ill like, you'd never manage."

"I see." Stephen felt a sudden weariness.

"So," Jenny resumed, "Mr. Tapley thinks you ought to come along with me. Sea air is wonderful to pick a person up."

"Dr. Margate," the Captain confirmed with a sententious nod. "He'll put you on your pins in no time."

A sudden warmth replaced the chill around Stephen's heart. But he shook his head. "I've abused your kindness enough."

"It's no trouble, sir. Florrie'll be glad to have you. You can pay her for your board just what you pay me."

There was no withstanding their joint persuasions, so well meant, so bent on getting him back to health.

On the following Monday, Stephen and his landlady took train for Margate. They arrived at three in the afternoon. Even on the station platform Stephen felt, like an electric shock, the tang and tingle of that magnificent salt sea air, unsurpassable in all of England. Ernie Wood, Florrie's fifteen-year-old nephew, was at the station to meet them with the pony cart.

Florrie's place was on the harbor, in the Row — a broken sweep of tumble-down buildings facing across the cobblestones, a confused vista of masts, cordage and tidal silt, with the long stretch of the pier and the tumbling gray of the North Sea beyond. Her shop, Number 49, was painted bright blue, with a marble slab behind the open window, and a gilt sign which read: *Florrie Baines: Wet Fish: Shrimps and Cockles a Specialty*. Above, approached by a side stone staircase, were the living quarters.

The visitors were shown by Ernie to a snug front parlor occupied by a fine yellow cat. Ernie dashed below to relieve his aunt, who soon appeared, a spare and angular woman of forty, rolling down her cardigan sleeves over her bare, chilled arms. When she had kissed Jenny affectionately, she examined Stephen across her

prominent nose, and offered a hand limp and cool as a fillet of sole. "I expect you're ready for tea. Sit down."

She brought from the back regions a large tray holding toast, teapot and a sizzling platter of fried fish. Seated erect at the table, she began to serve her guests.

"And how are things, Florrie?" Jenny asked.

"Mustn't grumble. The stall is a worry."

"Always is, Florrie." Jenny smiled at Stephen, bent on bringing him into the conversation. "Florrie rents a pitch near the promenade. She's famous for her shrimps and cockles."

"I did think I had a name for flounder." Florrie looked hurt.

"Of course, you have, dear."

"This we are having is most delicious," Stephen said.

"Plaice," Florrie corrected gloomily. "Help yourself. Plenty more in the sea."

It was apparent to Stephen that he was the object of his hostess's suspicion. For Jenny's sake he felt he must try to dispel it. He had observed Florrie's fondness for the yellow cat, which she fed with morsels from her own plate, and taking his sketchbook and a crayon from his pocket he began to sketch the tawny animal. Ten minutes and the thing was done. He removed the sheet, handed it to Florrie.

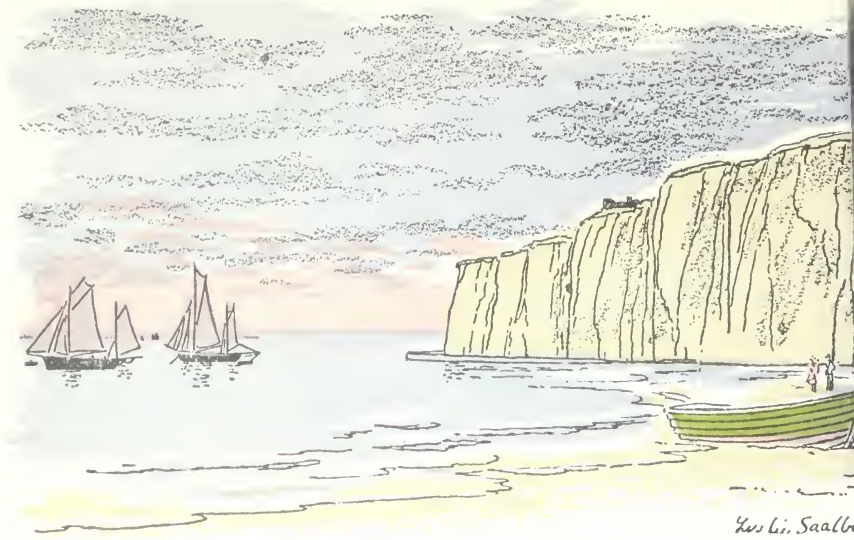
"Well, I declare . . ." Surprise, fear of being taken in, doubt were reflected in her features until finally she yielded to satisfaction. "It's as like Ginger as two peas. So you *are* an artist, after all."

"If it pleases you, I hope you'll accept it."

"You'll never make a living if you give your things away."

Although reproving him, she was plainly pleased. After tea, when he said he would go out for a brief walk, she called after him: "Be careful of the wind. Margate looks straight out to the North Pole."

This geographic fact was accurate, but Stephen enjoyed the cold. And now, with the bracing air filling his lungs, he felt the springs of vigor stir within him. In his first flicker of optimism since the trial, he decided to attempt no work during the next two weeks — he would concentrate on clearing up once and for all this absurd bronchial condition. On the darkening sea-front promenade,



with the wind humming and sighing in his ears like a great sea shell, the loose sand swirling about him, his pulse quickened and raising his head he thought, "Perhaps I'll still prove that I am not beaten after all."

In the days which followed, Stephen's spirits lifted further. How happy he was with these simple people. The salty life around the harbor, the comings and goings of the smacks, the unloading of the catch — all this diverted his mind from the bitterness of reflection. He increased the length of his walks, slept with his window wide open to the breeze. Best of all was the bathing. It was the brusque tonic which, more than anything, accelerated Stephen's recovery, restored in him the desire to paint and, most glorious of all, the surging knowledge of his own creative powers.

He was much alone — Florrie was supervising her stall, Jenny had her hands full in the shop, while Ernie, every afternoon, made the round with the cart. But one day Florrie proposed a family excursion. "We close half-day Wednesday," she said, "so we'll go shrimping. I shall show you where, when and how we catch 'em.

And if you want to freeze to death you can have one of your North Pole bathes. That suit you, Michael Angelo?"

"It sounds delightful, Florrie," he agreed amiably.

Punctually at two o'clock on a cloudy Wednesday the party set off in the cart, driving along the shore road. After about five miles Ernie turned from the main highway into a grassy track. Here the pony was turned loose to graze while Florrie led the way through tufted dunes to a secluded sandy bay guarded by rocky promontories and open only to the sea.

"What a lovely spot," exclaimed Stephen. "You'll have a dip with me, Ernie?"

"Got to gather sticks and dig the cockles." Ernie excused himself, and hastily moved off.

"I'm game," said Jenny, and at his look of surprise burst out laughing. "Race you first in."

They changed behind not too adjacent rocks. She reached the water first and struck out ahead of him through the surf. Then she turned and floated with eyes closed. Rounded and young, she seemed quite unchanged by those ten years which had passed since

first he knew her. He saw in her a natural attractiveness which made him marvel that she had not found another husband.

"Jenny, why have you never married again?"

She sat up, with a splash and a splutter.

"A few fellows have come around. But I couldn't fancy them." She smiled suddenly. "You know how it is, Mr. Desmonde. Once bitten twice shy." Before he could speak she darted off toward the shore.

When they had put on their clothes, they walked barefoot to the sheltered side of the cove where Florrie and Ernie were waiting with the shrimp nets, each attached to a long pole with a wooden end bar, like a rake.

"Better late than never," Florrie greeted them caustically. "Take your net from Ernie." Resting the wooden bar on the bottom, she started off through the shallow water, pushing the net before her, raising a smoky cloud of sand. Ernie and Jenny ranged themselves in line moving slowly behind, and a little out. Stephen followed. In the clear water just ahead he could discern faintly the gelatinous shapes of the shrimps with their delicate antennae. Translucent, transmitting only the mottled color of the sand, each had a tiny jet-black eye which seemed to warn it of danger. The whole school scurried hither and thither. Many escaped, but at the end of the drag the nets held a reasonable haul.

"Bring the bucket, Ernie," Florrie commanded. "Only keep the biggest ones, turn the tiddlers back. And you three carry on. I'm going by the rocks for cockles."

The wind blew soft, the sun came out like a shiny orange. In the space of an hour the bucket was filled. Then, from the rocks, where a driftwood fire smoked and sparked, came Florrie's shout. They joined her. A white cloth had been spread on a smooth dry ledge, weighted at the corners with pebbles, the tea was made, and on the fire stood an iron pot of boiling water.

"I shall have chilblains after this," said Florrie, holding her blue toes to the blaze. Then with a nod toward the shrimps: "In with them."

"Shame," murmured Jenny, with a little shiver as the squirming crustaceans disappeared in the steam. "Poor things."

"They don't feel nothing," Ernie reassured her. "Ain't got nerves like us. That so, Mr. Desmonde?"

Stephen, staring at Jenny, scarcely heard the question. She stood there against a dull sunset, shrimp net on her shoulder, barelegged, skirt tucked back, showing a clean flounced petticoat, blouse open at the throat, her cheeks stung by sea and scudding sand to a bright vermilion, wind-tangled hair a deep blue-black, her figure, short and sturdy, bent slightly forward. He thought to himself, if only I could paint her like that.

The tea was strong, dark, scalding hot. Then Florrie served the cockles, noting the surprise which Stephen evinced on tasting them. "Never thought they'd be so good, eh?" she chided him. "Swallow the juice as well."

They were delicious — each in its white fluted shell, delicate and saline, a fresh sea fruit, holding the essence of the ocean.

Next came the succulent shrimps, straight from the pot. They ate them with thick slabs of cottage loaf spread with country butter. More tea. Then a cheesecake which Jenny had baked the previous evening.

A silence followed, intensified by the slow, rhythmic rustle of the incoming tide. In a strange and glowing mood of indolence, watching the pale moon take substance in the clear sky, Stephen wished this lovely hour might not quickly end. But at last Florrie stirred. "Getting dark. Better make a bend."

The picnic things were gathered up, the pony reharnessed, the lamp candles lit; Florrie and Ernie took their seats in front. Stephen held out his hand to pull Jenny up beside him in the back. He clasped her fingers tightly, drew her toward him. And in that simple act, he experienced the liberation of an emotion that had burgeoned within him throughout the afternoon, a tide of intoxication which made his heart turn over and left him speechless. Could it be that she shared the emotion? That throbbing pulse, as they sat close together in the darkness, was it from the pounding of his blood? Or was hers pounding too?

They ambled on steadily and all too soon drew into the town, which welcomed them with a glitter of lights, reflected on the oily water of the harbor. At the end of the Row, where the stable was

situated, Ernie pressed Jenny to stay while he unharnessed the pony, and Florrie and Stephen set out for the shop. As they walked along the quay, Stephen was conscious of his companion's sidelong scrutiny.

"Jenny's a nice little thing," Florrie began. "She's wise, yet she's simple. Works hard. As for kindheartedness! I do hope she'll make up with a fine steady feller one of these days. Someone with a good regular wage, as would take proper care of her. For instance, there's a local feller by the name of Hawkins, half owner in a brand-new trawler. He's pretty gone on her."

Stephen kept silence, not knowing how to answer. Although her tone was casual, he sensed a note of warning. They went up the stone stairs and into the house. In the kitchen she turned to him with a brightness which convinced him that her remarks had been deliberate. "How about a sandwich? And a drop of ale?"

No, at this moment he could not remain to face Jenny.

"I'm rather tired, I think I'll turn in. Good night, Florrie."

He went to his room, stood for a long moment in perturbed thought from which he tried to rouse himself by reaching for his sketchbook. He made, during the next hour, several pastel drawings of the beach impression but none of them pleased him. He put the book away, began to undress.

In bed, he stretched at full length in the cool sheets. Through the open window he could see a swath of milky sky in which a few bright stars hung, low and placid. But there was no placidity in him. His skin, smarting from the strong air, seemed on fire.

Presently, through the thin wall he heard the quiet movements, the low-toned conversation of the two women as they prepared to retire. He covered his ears with the pillow. But that sunset vision of Jenny fusing with wind, sea and sand had made an image, clear and shining as Venetian glass, that was less easy to dismiss. At last, drugged with air, he fell asleep.

His two weeks' stay would end on Saturday, in three days' time. And he believed that, by the exercise of self-control, he might get through this brief period without making a fool of himself. On Thursday morning he went to the harbor and set himself to work

on a series of marine impressions. After wasting two sheets of paper he went moodily to the Dolphin and lunched on bread and cheese and a pint of shandygaff. The afternoon was no better and he gave up in disgust. With the sketching block under his arm, his shoulders hunched, he hung around the old town, killing time.

Was he seriously in love? The situation seemed impossible. He was thirty, subject to a weakness of the chest, disowned by his family, bound irrevocably to that profitless mistress, art. And Jenny? She was a simple cockney woman with no more knowledge of painting than an Eskimo. Besides, hadn't he been warned off by Florrie? But he could not put Jenny from his mind.

In desperation, he set out for a brisk walk along the promenade. As he was passing the Grand Hotel, a man in a bowler hat, carrying a square black bag, emerged from the swing doors. There came an instant of mutual recognition.

"Dash it all, if it isn't Desmonde! What a surprise!"

It was Harry Chester. He was wearing a seedy overcoat. His face had coarsened; his eyes were shifty. Seizing Stephen's hand he shook it effusively. "Come along. You must have a drink with me."

They went into the bar of the hotel, where Chester's foot automatically sought the brass rail and he tilted back his hat.

"What brings you to Margate?" Stephen asked when Harry had ordered their drinks.

"Business, my boy. The South Coast is my beat."

"You've given up painting?"

"Good Lord, yes. I have a damn good job." He delivered the fiction with an affable smile. "Promoting the cleanliness of the nation. I sell soap for a first-rate firm."

"Do you hear anything of Lambert?" Stephen asked.

"Last thing I heard of Philip he was designing wallpaper for some potty little firm in Chantilly." He paused, and shook his head. "Of course . . . you know about Emmy?"

"No."

"Don't you read the newspapers? One night, about six months after you left, she went up for her act. They said at the inquest that the track was wet, not well enough lit, but in my opinion it

was she who was too well lit. She flubbed the take-off, lost her balance, landed on her head and broke her neck."

Stephen was silent. The news, while it shocked him, had a strange remoteness. Nor had he time to dwell upon it, for suddenly, with a glance at the clock above the bar, Chester tossed off his drink and exclaimed, "Good Lord, I've only seven minutes to catch my train. Good-by, old man. Been wonderful seeing you. Thanks for the drink." Resetting his bowler to a more rakish angle, and swinging his black bag of samples, he went off with a swagger.

Stephen paid the reckoning and made his way through the falling darkness of the Row. After this meeting, with its reminders of that self-deluded period in France, it was a relief to contemplate the cheerful ordinariness that he would find in the warm kitchen of No. 49. He mounted the steps with sudden briskness.

Within, Ernie sat at the table. Jenny was busy at the stove.

"Thank goodness," she greeted him with a cheerful face. "I been keeping your supper. We've had ours a good half-hour."

The warmth of her welcome, the glow in the homely little room, touched him like a blessing. He sat down beside Ernie.

Tipping open the oven door with her foot, Jenny took a dish towel, brought out a deep platter of shepherd's pie, placed it on the table. "Mind, it's hot. Move over, Ernie."

When he sat down and began to eat, she took the chair opposite, observing his appetite with approval.

"You've picked up down here."

"I'm a new man, Jenny. And owe it all to you."

"Go on with you! Try these pickled onions."

Later, as she dried the dishes, a sudden idea came to Stephen.

"You wouldn't care to come to the cinema, Jenny?"

She gave him a quick smile, but shook her head. "I'm not one for the pictures really. Especially a beautiful night like this."

He saw the round silver moon rising over the harbor pool. He said: "Then let's take a walk."

She looked pleased. "Would be nice, after being cooped in all day. I'll have my coat on in a jiffy."

Then, asking Ernie to tell Florrie they'd be back in half an hour, she led the way downstairs and they set off toward the promenade.

The night was warm and clear, the moon at its dazzling full, the Milky Way a path of silver. On the benches along the promenade, lovers sat holding hands. The sea shimmered, a great sea serpent rustling its sequin scales. Too quickly they came to the end of the walk and Stephen said:

"It's so light, shall we go along the sands?" She made no objection and as they stepped out on the wide waste of sand he reflected aloud: "I feel as if I'd known you all my life."

She made no reply. And in silence they continued over the deserted beach upon which white shells gleamed like fallen stars. He turned to her. "Let's rest a little, and look at the moon."

They found a sheltered hollow in the dunes, and Jenny spread out her coat for them to sit on.

"It is a shame we have to leave day after tomorrow," she murmured presently. "Margate is nice this time of year."

"I have certainly enjoyed it."

She did not look at him; her gaze was straight ahead. "I shouldn't wish to seem pushing, sir, but I was hoping you'd keep your room in Stepney on for a while. With you and Captain Tapley in the house there's such a nice settled feeling."

"I should like to. But I ought to be on the move again."

"It's terrible the way you've lived, no one to look after you." There was distress in her voice. "Do you really have to?"

He did not answer. To be so near her was more than he could endure. He passed an arm firmly around her waist.

"You shouldn't do that, sir," she protested.

"Don't call me sir, Jenny." And suddenly he kissed her. Her lips were full and warm as a plum on a sunny wall.

His heart was beating like mad. Anything he had known before was nothing compared to this sweet intoxication. He saw that her breath came quickly, that her eyes were tightly shut. When he touched her lips again she returned his kiss. Her arms reached out and twined themselves about his neck.

At last he raised his head and looked into her eyes.

"Jenny, you do care for me?"

"You know I do." She clung to him. "I always have."

He took her small hand, gritty with sand, and held it tight.

"Jenny, if you'll have me, we'll get a license tomorrow at the registry. We're in it together now, for better or worse."

Chapter Thirteen

A good seven years later, on an autumn morning in the year 1928, before the first pencil of light had penetrated the back ground-floor bedroom in Cable Street, Stephen awoke. For a while he lay still, conscious of his wife beside him; then, without disturbing her, he got up and dressed in serge trousers and the thick blue woolen jersey she had knitted for him. He went along the passage, knocked three times on Joe Tapley's door and entered the kitchen.

The kettle had already been filled for him the night before and the table was prepared, as usual. The Cap'n joined him and they sat down to a breakfast cooked by Stephen. When they had finished, Tapley said, "Wind's from the west."

Stephen nodded, and bent forward to the old man's ear.

"We ought to get that cloud effect this morning."

He rose, filled a fresh cup of tea and took it to the bedroom, where, covering the cup with the saucer, he placed it on the table by the bed. Then he and Tapley went out together.

At half past six the alarm clock whirred, Jenny opened her eyes, blinked at the cup of tea beside her, felt it to be stone cold and immediately got up. By eight o'clock she had dressed, breakfasted, lit the fire beneath the scullery boiler and taken up Miss Pratt's morning tray. At a quarter to nine Miss Pratt, the occupant of the upstairs back room, went off to her infants' class at the Stepney Board School. Jenny tidied up, made all the beds, and put her head out the back door in exploratory fashion. Today was her washday.

As she sorted out the linen she began to sing. She counted herself a lucky woman to be privileged to love and serve this extraordinary man. She watched him in all his moods — so different from her own balanced common sense — with tender and possessive wonder. His carelessness in respect of meals, clothing and conventional obligations made her shake her head. Yet his desire to paint, she

looked upon with kindly tolerance. It was a gentlemanly occupation that gave him pleasure and relaxation and took him out into the good fresh air. For if she had a worry, it was his health. She did not like that cough, now so permanent it seemed a part of him, and which he completely ignored.

When her washing was blowing lustily on the clothesline, she made her lunch, then cut up meat and chopped vegetables for a stew. The Glyns were coming to supper. The thought pleased her — she liked Anna, and she knew that it did Stephen good to see Richard.

Toward two o'clock the front doorbell pealed. She answered, and before her stood a spare, clean-shaven man in a somewhat worn trench coat. He raised his hat. "Is Mr. Desmonde at home?"

"No," she said. "I am Mrs. Desmonde."

"I wonder if I might talk with you for a moment. My name is Charles Maddox. I used to be your husband's agent."

"Please come in," she said. In the little front parlor, spotless and chilly, with its plush-covered furniture, upright piano, and fern in the window, she faced him warily.

"Mrs. Desmonde," he said, "I want to ask you to persuade your husband to permit me to handle his work. I have not in eight years had a Desmonde canvas in my gallery. While I am sure," he threw a quick glance of interrogation, "in his studio there are scores."

"Yes," she answered mildly, nodding toward the shed which Stephen had built for a studio. "But after they used him so bad, he vowed he'd never show another picture in his life."

"That was long ago, Mrs. Desmonde. Now I have reason to believe that his paintings would find a discriminating market."

"My husband," she articulated the word with tender pride, "my husband doesn't care a button for money."

"But surely a larger income would make things much easier." He glanced round the little parlor, wondering how a person of Desmonde's taste could bear to live in it. "You could have a larger home. You could have help in the house, a good servant."

She laughed mirthfully, charmingly, as though he had made an excellent joke. "I *was* a servant, Mr. Maddox, and I hope a good

one. I tell you, I shouldn't be happy if we lived any different than we do now. We shouldn't be one half so cozy."

He gazed at her with growing respect. "I suppose I couldn't look round the studio?" he ventured.

Her refusal was kindly. "It might, p'raps, be as well to speak to Mr. Desmonde first."

He picked up his hat and rose. "You might be good enough to tell him that I called."

"Certainly. But I shouldn't build too much on it if I was you."

At five o'clock the doorbell rang again and Jenny hurried to admit her visitors. "I'm so sorry," she said, when she had greeted them, "Stephen isn't home yet."

"We're ahead of time." Glyn hung his hat and scarf on the hall stand. "By the way, did you have a call today from Maddox?"

"Yes," Jenny said guardedly.

"You let him have a couple of Stephen's paintings, I hope."

"Good gracious, no. I couldn't, without permission."

"I see," said Glyn. "Well, you two women can get together and gossip. I'll go into the studio."

He went through the kitchen and entered the ramshackle wooden shed where Stephen worked. On an easel in the center of the floor was a large incomplete painting of the river, while at the farther end unframed canvases of assorted sizes were stacked.

Richard took a good look at the unfinished work, then he removed the painting, placed another upon the easel and sat down on a broken sofa to study it — a process he repeated several times.

At fifty, Glyn had an air of maturity. The untamed bohemian spirit that had made him flout orthodoxy had been mellowed by well-merited success. His work had been accepted as a worthy contribution to English art. Yet now, as he pondered over Stephen's work in its audacity of color, its disregard of the conventional rules, its sense of mystery, of something withheld, he knew that the paintings were not only far superior to his own, they were fit to hang in company with the great. And as he considered how, during these past seven years, Desmonde had labored without ceasing, leading the life of a recluse, nursing a dangerous sense of

persecution, he felt that it was time to act, to break at last this sustained complex of withdrawal.

Recognition — that was the solution. It had done much for him. It would do everything for Desmonde. He had been in consultation with Maddox, and now that the agent's visit had failed in its purpose he saw that he must act upon his own initiative.

He picked up a painting he had already singled out — *Hampstead Heath* — and wrapped it in paper. He went out into the back alley and down to the corner pub, where he asked the barman to hold the package until later that evening. It was not quite six o'clock when he got back to the yard and entered the kitchen.

Stephen had just arrived. As they shook hands, Glyn could not help thinking how great was the change in his friend since the days when he had first known him. Standing there, erect, in his rough paint-stained clothes, an old scarf draped across his shoulders, he conveyed the impression of a man supported by nothing but his own intensity. But the high color on his cheekbones and the extraordinary brightness of his eyes gave to his expression a vivid sense of life.

"How is old mother Thames coming along?" Glyn asked.

"I'm having trouble with her — as usual. What have you been doing lately?"

"I'm starting a portrait of Lord Hammersley."

"You're doing lots of portraits now. Isn't he the brewer?"

Glyn glanced sideways, wondering if there was not the slightest irony in the other's tone, but Desmonde's expression had remained open and cheerful. Then Jenny, her face reddened by the stove, came forward and cheerfully bade them be seated.

It was a plain but satisfying meal. Glyn set to heartily, yet could not but remark how indifferent was Stephen's appetite. But his mood was lighthearted, the beauty and life in his eyes were irresistible as he described how, after a barge had almost run him down in midstream, he had engaged in argument with the skipper.

"It was a good slanging match," he concluded gaily. "After it I completely lost my voice."

"What!" exclaimed Jenny, with a glance toward him.

"It was nothing. When I'm working I've no need to talk."

Glyn turned to Stephen. "This kind of life you've fallen into . . . it's not good for you. We must get you out of it."

Stephen smiled. "And how would you set about it?"

"By insuring that you have the rewards you so richly deserve."

"I don't want success. I've no time for it. Now that I'm free from the desire for it I can give myself unreservedly to my work."

"Now look here, Desmonde." Glyn spoke a trifle heatedly. "Let's be sensible. Do you propose never to show your work?"

"Yes. In my early years I wanted passionately to show my paintings, to gain renown. Now I simply do not care. I love my things, I like them around me. Praise or blame has but a momentary effect on the man whose love of beauty makes him the severest critic of his own works. And don't blame me for that statement. It was Keats who made it."

Glyn seemed about to embark on an explosive harangue, but he checked it. Adopting a mild tone, he said, "I think it's high time you came out of hiding. Now, I have two tickets for Covent Garden. *Don Giovanni.* Thursday night. Will you come?"

Stephen shook his head. "I'm too busy now."

"Do go, Stephen," Jenny said.

Desmonde looked from one to the other, a faint sign of strain appearing on his face. It was in this very isolation which Glyn decried, in his work, in the happy obscurity of his life with Jenny that he found the peace that saved him. A refusal was on the tip of his tongue, but the desire to please his wife and Glyn caused him to relax his rule.

"All right," he said. "I'll come."

For some years nothing of consequence had disturbed the tranquillity of Stephen's life. But now, set in motion by Glyn's visit, a sequence of unexpected events began to harass him.

Coming out of the opera at Covent Garden, he had run into Claire, grown older and more severe in appearance. From her expression — startled, then suddenly fixed — he knew how painful this meeting was for her. She was shocked when he told her where he had been living all these years, and it was evident that she had later given his address to Caroline, for after some days a letter

arrived from Stillwater. Jenny placed it on Stephen's plate to await his return from the river. When he had eaten his supper he opened it; then, observing her look of eager interest, he said:

"It's from Caroline. She wants me to meet her."

"You will, won't you?"

"What earthly good could it do?"

"Surely it's good to see your sister. She's your own flesh and blood."

He had to smile, not only at the reproach, but at her earnestness. He touched her hand. Her reasonableness, the open simplicity of her nature seemed always to bring him back from that strange country into which he strayed alone. He realized how much he owed to her abundant, healthy good temper, to her understanding, her instinctive knowledge of human nature.

"I love you, Jenny. And because of that I'll go."

On Wednesday of the following week, though he felt unaccountably tired, he set out for Victoria Station, where Caroline had said she would await him. He got off the bus and pushed through the crowded platforms. By the bookstall he saw a short, middle-aged woman, her hair streaked with gray, dressed in an ill-fitting brown tweed costume. When she caught sight of him, her anxious face lighted up, she came forward and, with a little nervous gasp, greeted him. It was his sister.

"What a wretched morning," she exclaimed. "My umbrella blew inside out."

"You'd be glad of a cup of coffee. Shall we go to the buffet?"

They entered the station restaurant, and when they had ordered Caroline said, "I suppose I'd better begin at the beginning. We are leaving Stillwater. We are forced to sell it."

He looked at her in surprise. "But where are you going?"

"To one of Mould's brick bungalows with no view, no garden, and only four small rooms. It's unbearable."

She could not fail to note that the news disturbed him, but he said comfortingly, "I've often heard you complain that Stillwater was far too large and old-fashioned. It may be that you'll find the bungalow more convenient."

"How can you say that?" she exclaimed. "Stillwater has been

the home of the Desmondes for two hundred years. Doesn't that mean anything to you?"

"Yes," he said, after a moment's reflection. Then he asked, "Who is buying it?"

"Can't you guess?"

"Mould?"

She nodded, bitter tears starting to her eyes.

"How did this ever come about?"

"It was Mother. You know how she always was . . . no idea of the value of money. Just twelve months ago we discovered that she was in the hands of moneylenders, who threatened Father with a lawsuit if he didn't pay up."

"How large an amount?"

"Almost ten thousand pounds, with the exorbitant interest charged. It was sheer extortion, blackmail if you like, but Father decided we must pay. Better to be ruined with honor, he said, than to face disgrace. . . ."

As she broke off, Stephen said, "In a way I always admired her for doing exactly what she wanted. Where is she now?"

Caroline answered in a suppressed voice, "In a private asylum in Dulwich."

He stared at her blankly.

"Stephen, if you'd only stayed at home, gone into the church, helped Father keep control over Mother, we'd all still be happy at Stillwater." She leaned forward. "Even now, it isn't too late. Father needs you — "

"Carrie," he interrupted her, "you know I'm married. Do you want us both down there in your four-room bungalow?"

"Then there's nothing more to be said." She sighed, drew on her damp cotton gloves, picked up the ruin of her umbrella. Her head was turned from him, and a surreptitious glance revealed that she was weeping quietly. Her sorrow left him wretched and subdued, attacked by a sudden realization of his uselessness in the material world. In this family crisis Caroline must naturally look to him for help. Yet he could not, or would not, give it. No human attachment, no force on earth could divert him from the course that he had chosen. Abruptly, he shook off a sudden sense of

giddiness. He felt confoundedly seedy — his wet feet were icy, and he was aware of that strange, recurrent numbness in his throat.

They left the buffet and walked back into the station. The departure board indicated that a train would leave for Halborough in three minutes' time. "If I rush, I'll get it," Carrie exclaimed nervously. "Thank you for meeting me, Stephen. Good-by."

He took her to the barrier, they shook hands hurriedly and awkwardly, and he watched until she boarded the train. As he came out of the station the newsboys were calling the early editions of the evening papers. He stopped short and, with a sickening sense of dismay, read the headlines in the placards: *Academy Sensation: Scandal of the Charminster Panels Revived.*

It was five o'clock when he reached Cable Street and there, pacing up and down at the corner bus stop, was Glyn.

"Jenny told me I might catch you here." Glyn seemed disturbed. "Let's have a drink. I must talk to you."

Stephen accompanied the other across the road and into the bar of the corner pub. Glyn ordered two whiskies served hot. When the grog arrived, Stephen gulped down a mouthful of the steaming liquid. He was struggling to keep his nerves under control.

"So now you know," Glyn said suddenly. "I took your *Hampstead Heath* and sent it to the Academy."

"Without consulting me."

"If I had, would you have let me have it?"

"No . . . never."

At the violence of the reply Glyn shot a quick glance at Stephen. "Blame me as much as you please. But remember, I tried to act for the best. The meeting of the selection committee took place at eleven o'clock this morning. You probably know the procedure. The members sit in a semicircle of armchairs. As the paintings are brought in one at a time and placed on a throne, they vote on them. Acceptance is indicated by raising a hand, rejection by keeping the hands down. It was an extra-poor lot this year. We were getting down to the thin end of the submissions when your *Heath* came in — as a matter of fact I'd arranged it that way. And it really hit the spot. I could tell at once that the men around me were impressed.

When I raised my hand five members followed suit — all from the new group coming on in the Academy."

In spite of his determination to remain detached, Stephen felt a tremor go through his limbs.

Glyn went on, "There's another group — the old guard. I hadn't expected this lot to like your picture, and it was obvious they didn't. However, I felt sure you were in, when Sir Moses Stanley suddenly got up — you know him, he paints nothing but cows. He hobbled over to the easel, shook his head, then slewed round and said:

" 'I sincerely hope the committee will remember its responsibilities to the nation before passing favorable judgment on this work. I have been a member of the Royal Academy for more than thirty years. During that time, by setting my face sternly against all foreign influence, I have helped to keep our heritage undefiled. This picture is clearly unwholesome. It is distorted and pernicious. It is no more like Hampstead Heath than my foot. It is rank socialism.'

"There was much more in this vein," Glyn said. "I was boiling mad. There was your beautiful painting and here was this uncomprehending cow fancier, with the other die-hards leaning over to congratulate him. I got on my feet.

" 'You say that our responsibility is to suppress. I say it is to support and encourage. Every original artist of the past hundred years has been the victim of this sort of assassination — such men as Cézanne, Van Gogh, Gaugin — but in spite of that their work lives. And I'll wager this — the painting before us now will still be alive when everyone in this room is dead and forgotten.' "

Glyn drank, then shook his head. "There was a hollow pause. Then the president proposed that the vote be taken and I began to sense that in general the committee was favorable. I'll swear to it. They were for you. The hands were ready to go up when all at once Peters, another member of the old guard, suddenly said: 'One moment, please. I must inform you that the painter of this picture is the man responsible for the notorious Charminster panels, who was convicted in open court of producing and exhibiting obscene art. How can we sanction work from such a source?'

"I jumped up again. 'Are we judging panels that were burned

through ignorance seven years ago, or this painting before us now?'

"I can't remember all I said, but it was no use. Even those who would otherwise have supported you were afraid to risk a scandal. There was only one thing for me to do. I resigned on the spot. And I'm glad I did. I've been getting soft in these last years, Desmonde, my work isn't near as good as it used to be. And now I hope you're not angry at me."

Stephen gazed at the other in silence, his features pale and impassive. The long recital had carried him through anger and distress to a final indifference. But the hurt was deep. If only Richard had left him alone! Still, he could bear no rancor. He held out his hand.

Glyn clapped him fraternally on the shoulder.

"Let's go, Desmonde. I'll see you home. And if there's trouble ahead, we'll bloody well stand up to it."

THIS startling incident at the Academy was a windfall to the popular press. The new scandal rekindled the ashes of the old. A drawing of Stephen standing in the dock at Charminster was reproduced. A journalist read by millions wrote an article under the heading "Art Run Amuck." There were snickers in the livelier publications, jokes on the vaudeville stage, cartoons in the picture weeklies.

During the days that followed, Stephen went on working with that disregard of exterior events which now took the form of contempt. Because he felt so deeply, he had learned to impose upon himself a rigid self-control that enabled him to sustain misfortune with outward calmness. Yet there were moments when life seemed so frightening he felt he could not face it. He had lost something he greatly prized, the sense of anonymity, of being unnoticed in the common flow of humanity. The strain told upon him and, even when the hubbub began to slacken, left him physically worn down.

One Saturday when he got home from Tapley's jetty, he felt thoroughly done up and his throat was peculiarly numb. Jenny had his lunch ready, and while he ate she sat at the table opposite him, watching in silence. When he had finished, she washed the dishes, removed her apron and picked up her knitting. He began,

drawn by her homely warmth, to relate the events of his morning, but his voice cracked and his words came in a husky whisper. His wife's eyes lifted sharply from her work. Articulating with difficulty, he said: "All day I've felt I was going to lose my voice. And now I have."

"You've caught cold." She spoke with the mild accusation of one who continually reproved him for neglecting himself, yet this was no more than a screen for the anxiety that gripped her. "I shall go round for that new Doctor Gray."

She had wanted for some time to have him examined by the local panel practitioner. She slipped on her raincoat, went out, and in a short time was back with the information that Doctor Gray would call as soon as he returned from his afternoon round of visits.

No sooner had she concluded than Stephen was again able to speak in a perfectly normal manner. "You see," he said, "you've made a fuss about nothing. It's just nerves, or something equally futile."

She gazed after him, distressed, as he went into the studio to work. An hour passed and she began to wonder if the doctor would come at all. At that point, the doorbell rang and she found on the threshold a young man.

"I'm Doctor Gray. Where is the patient?"

Jenny took him into the kitchen and, having called Stephen, left them together. The doctor put down his bag, removed his hat but not his overcoat, with the air of one sorely pressed for time.

"What seems to be the trouble?" he asked.

"Something quite trivial. I keep losing my voice."

"Have you any pain?"

"None at all. I have been conscious of a slight numbness in my throat. Imagination, no doubt."

Doctor Gray made an impatient sound with his tongue. Another neurosis, he suspected. Yet this man didn't look like a hysteric.

"Let's have a look at you. Strip to the waist and sit down."

Stephen did as he was bid. The doctor had taken from his bag a round mirror which he adjusted upon his forehead and, directing a beam of light upon the reflecting surface of a laryngoscope held

at the back of the patient's throat, he made an inspection. Then he put on his stethoscope and examined Stephen's chest. Finally, he evinced a certain interest in the ends of Stephen's fingers.

"You may dress now." The doctor returned his instruments to the bag. "How long have you had a cough?"

"I've been bothered with bronchitis off and on for a number of years. I always had a weak chest."

"Bronchitis, eh? Can you remember the first time you had a bad cold, with a pain in your side, that just wouldn't clear up?"

Stephen's thoughts went back to the drenching day of the Channel crossing and the weeks at Netiers that had followed it.

"Yes," he said. "About fifteen years ago."

"Ever had any hemorrhages subsequently?"

"Yes. Twice." Stephen suppressed the attack he had suffered in Spain during the war years.

"How many years ago was the first? Could one say around fourteen?"

A vivid picture of the past came to Stephen — Dom Arthaud bending over him in the bare, whitewashed room.

"Yes."

The doctor, having washed his hands at the kitchen sink, was drying them on a dish towel. "You've had chest trouble all that time and a couple of hemorrhages? And you never bothered to find out what was causing it?"

"I never regarded it as serious. And I was always too busy."

"Doing what?"

"Painting. I'm an artist."

"Ah!" Doctor Gray, from solid industrial Manchester, compressed into that exclamation a wealth of ironic comprehension. Suddenly a thought struck him. "Good Lord, you're not the fellow that's been in the papers?"

"Does it make any difference?"

"No, no. Of course not."

He gazed at Stephen curiously and, despite his professional insensibility, not altogether without feeling. What chain of circumstances, what persistent self-neglect had brought this chap, obviously a gentleman, to such a pass? What was one to make of

such a case? Worse still, what could one say? He sat down on the arm of a chair.

"I have to tell you that you have advanced pulmonary tuberculosis. You have an old-standing lesion in the right lung. And now the left is acutely infected. Your larynx has become involved."

Stephen had turned pale. He steadied himself against the table. "But I don't understand. I've always been able to get about, I've felt all right. . . ."

"That's the curse of this thing." Gray shook his head in a kind of gloomy rancor. "Can be quiescent, then suddenly goes on the rampage. That's what has happened with you."

"I see. What is to be done about it?"

"You ought to get away to a sanatorium. At least a year."

"A year! Should I be allowed to paint?"

Doctor Gray shook his head. "You'd be in bed, my dear sir, flat on your back, in the open air."

Stephen was staring straight ahead. "No," he said, "I couldn't. I must paint. If I can't go on with my work it'll kill me."

"If you do go on . . ." The doctor broke off, shrugging.

"If I stay here and go on working, what is the outlook?"

Doctor Gray started to reply, then stopped. It was not his nature to equivocate, yet something prevented him from bluntly communicating the truth. He said: "One can never tell. With luck you may go on for quite a bit."

He pulled a prescription pad from his overcoat pocket, wrote briskly, tore off the slip and handed it to Stephen. "Get this made up. A tonic, and a spray for your throat. Take care of yourself, drink as much milk as you can, and push down a tablespoonful of cod-liver oil three times a day. Ask your wife to come in and see me at the surgery in the morning. The fee is three and six."

When Stephen had paid him, he picked up his bag, put on his hat and left the room. The front door closed behind him. Stephen stood quite motionless. Jenny came in from the scullery and from her expression, fixed and frightened, he knew that she had overheard everything. "You will go away, won't you, Stephen?"

"Never. I won't leave you, and I can't give up my work."

The suddenness of the blow had stunned her. Fiercely she

blamed herself for accepting his glossing over of his symptoms. Holding back her tears because she knew how much he hated them, she begged him to be sensible. But he shook his head.

"These doctors don't know everything. Perhaps I'm not as bad as he makes out. In any case, he says it's only fresh air I need." He lifted his head as at a sudden inspiration. Margate! It had always done him good. When he was so ill before, had it not completely cured him? All at once, that sporadic optimism so characteristic of his condition caused his spirits to rebound. While she looked at him, rent by the deepest anxiety, he gave her the shadow of a smile. "We'll pack up here, let Miss Pratt and Tapley fend for themselves. And if Florrie'll have us, we'll go to Margate."

Chapter Fourteen

In the little back kitchen above the fish shop Florrie sat warming herself at the stove with the cat upon her knee, gazing toward Jenny, who occupied a seat by the table. A pot of tea and a plate of bread and butter stood on a tray between the two women.

"Puss is shedding," Jenny said.

"Always does this time of year." Florrie stroked the animal, then flicked the yellow fluff from her fingers.

"How long now, Flo, since we've been with you?"

"Near seven weeks. Time does fly."

"You are good about it. It's an imposition really. Only, the air does seem to help him." Jenny paused. "Do you see an improvement, Flo?"

"I see a change . . . and a big one." Florrie took a slow sip of tea, then put down her cup. "And the sooner you face up to it, the better for you, my girl."

Jenny lowered her head, compressing her lower lip with her teeth — she had fought hard in these past weeks and would go on fighting harder. Yet it was difficult to keep discouragement from overwhelming her. What anguish she had endured, night after night, listening to his deep, hollow cough.

"I wish he'd come for his tea," she said, looking toward the door. "But it's no use to fetch him."

"Why a man in his condition should want to go on painting in that front room . . ." Florrie turned up her eyes. "Here, you haven't 'arf drunk your tea. Let me give you some fresh."

"No, Flo. I've turned against it, like."

"Don't you want no bread 'n' butter?"

Jenny shook her head.

"You *have* gone off your feed. At breakfast you didn't more'n touch your kipper. And come to think of it, these other mornings . . ." She broke off. Jenny had colored painfully. Florrie's expression registered incredulity, then shocked suspicion.

"It ain't that?" she said, at last, slowly.

Jenny, with averted head, did not answer.

"Oh, no," Florrie said, in a suppressed voice. "Oh, it makes me boil. After he's lived off you all these years, letting you work and slave for him, while he mooches around, slapping paint on a piece of canvas. And now, when he's about done for, to leave you pregnant — "

"Don't, Flo," Jenny interrupted fiercely. "Don't blame him."

"Well, I wish you joy I'm sure." Florrie spoke stiffly. "But how you'll manage, my gel, is quite another question."

"Don't be hard, Flo. You know I have a good pair of hands."

"Hands, yes," Florrie agreed gloomily. "But oh, my gel, where was your head?" She paused. "Have you told him?"

"I shan't till we get home. He'll be more like himself then."

With an effort, Florrie cut off the exasperated reply that rose to her lips. Soon after his arrival Stephen had begun to deteriorate and now his decline had become rapid. Her own doctor, whom she had called in a fortnight ago, had told her that Stephen's condition was hopeless and that another hemorrhage, which might occur at any moment, must prove fatal.

"Have it your own way." She shook her head resignedly. "But why you should go on sacrificing yourself fair beats me."

"There's some'at about him that you, nor anyone else, won't never understand. He's made me happy."

A sound in the passage abruptly terminated the conversation.

Stephen came into the room. "Am I late for tea?" he said, and smiled.

To see the smile on the tight-skinned, bony face drove a lance into Jenny's breast. In a matter-of-fact voice, pouring for him, she said: "We would have called you. But I thought you might be finishing up."

"As a matter of fact, I have finished. And it rather pleases me." He accepted a slice of bread and butter, sat down at the window. "It's as good as I can make it."

"And what's to happen to it now?" Florrie asked.

"Who knows?" he answered lightly.

Jenny could sense the contained excitement of his mood. She said sympathetically: "You've been a long time over that one."

"Six months. It was difficult to convey the sense of elemental things — the river, earth, air and water — and still preserve a harmony with the central theme."

"I hope it don't start such a nasty mess-up as you 'ad with that there last one," Florrie said.

"I hope not." He smiled. "This seems quite a respectable painting. And I promise it won't be exhibited."

"You really 'ave me beat. Don't it matter to you that you won't make a penny on this picture?"

"No. All that matters is that I've done it." He got up. "I'm going out now for a bit of a stroll."

"You shouldn't," Jenny said quickly. "It's cold outside."

"I must have a walk." He looked at her kindly. "You know that fresh air is good for me."

She came with him into the hall and helped him to wrap up in the thick coat she had bought him, gave him the stick he now used.

His progress along the street was slow. Each foot seemed weighted as he made his way toward the sea front. At the entrance to the esplanade there stood a circular rotunda, with mirrors in the windows, and as he passed he saw his drawn reflection in the glass. He grimaced and withdrew his gaze.

Presently he reached a bench which afforded an open prospect of the sea. A superb pale sunset, a streak of salmon merging to

primrose and faint green, was clear and delicate against the dove-gray sea.

Ever since his boyhood, he reflected, he had been obsessed by the desire to grasp the beauty imprisoned beneath the surface of things. He had pursued his destiny, yet who would ever understand the loneliness, the hours of sadness — broken by fits of momentary exultation — he had endured? He had no regrets; indeed, there was a strange peace upon him. Only out of pain and unhappiness, out of the hostility of the world, could he have created beauty. It was worth the price that he had paid.

The great culminating canvas he had now completed was the product of the strange nexus between his sickness and his art. It gave him an exalted sense of being above time and death, partaking of the eternal. The more ill he had become the more mysteriously his powers had been renewed. Yet he knew that he was doomed. The fount of physical energy within him had ceased to flow. He thought: I shall speak to Jenny tonight. It's time we were home. And again: Raphael died at thirty-seven. Why should I complain?

He got up and started back toward the Row. As he did so, a cheerful voice hailed him. It was Ernie, in a dark suit and bowler, with a rolled umbrella in his hand.

"Well! I fancied I might find you here." He slowed his pace, adjusting it tactfully to Stephen's. "Aunt Florrie asked me to look out for you and fetch you back. It's not often you have a visitor, and they didn't want you to miss him."

"A visitor? Who is it?"

"Search me. Regular toff by the look of him."

Stephen's brows drew together with a nervous constriction. Had his father or Uncle Hubert come to see him? As they turned the corner at the harbor he saw a large black car standing outside the shuttered entrance to the fish shop.

The door opened at once, and Florrie let them in. "There's a man to see you. A foreigner."

Stephen took off his coat, hung it on a peg with his hat and scarf and went into the front room. This was a small apartment, seldom used except for company, and at present completely disarranged

by Stephen's easel and the large canvas upon it. A fire sparked damply in the small black-leaded grate. Occupying the one easy chair, engaging Jenny in conversation, was a short, sallow-faced man who, as Stephen appeared, rose quickly to his feet.

"Monsieur Desmonde, I am happy to meet you."

His manner matched his impeccably severe suit, the dark pearl in his cravat, his glossy shoes. Stephen had recognized him at once and barely glanced at the visiting card which the other presented to him as Jenny excused herself and left the room.

"My dear Monsieur Desmonde, it is so good to make your acquaintance at last."

"Haven't we met before?"

"But where, my good sir?"

Stephen considered the dealer calmly. "In Paris, fifteen years ago. I was broke, starving in fact. I tried to sell you my paintings. You wouldn't even look at them."

Tessier's eye flickered slightly but his manner was proof against embarrassment. He threw out his hands in charming apology.

"Then I assure you the shoe is now on the other foot. For I have come all the way to London to seek you out. Only by the greatest perseverance did I obtain your address here, from Monsieur Glyn."

"I wish you had not put yourself to so much trouble."

"My dear sir, it is a pleasure." Tessier resumed his chair. "Recently there has been in Paris a growing interest in your work. Some time ago one of your paintings, *Convent Sisters Returning from Church,* belonging to the colorman Campo was shown in the window of Salomon et Cie, a relatively unimportant dealer. Here it was seen by Georges Bernard, a most distinguished art critic. The following Thursday in *La Revue Gauloise,* he praised *Sisters* in the highest terms. The next morning the picture was sold.

"Now Campo is not altogether a fool. He had no less than twenty of your canvases. He took all of these to Bernard, and asked him to sponsor an exhibition. This was held two months ago, again unfortunately, at Salomon's. Every one of the pictures was sold. There remained not a single Desmonde canvas in Paris. No," he corrected himself, "I am wrong. Just after the initial excite-

ment there came into Paris, from a grocer in Normandy, a delicious pastel of two young girls." He looked inquiringly at Stephen. "You recollect the work?"

"Perfectly. They were the Cruchot children."

"Such was the name. And the pastel, it may interest you to know, sold for no less than fifteen thousand francs."

"Good," Stephen said in a flat voice. "That would please Madame Cruchot greatly."

"Monsieur Desmonde, the collectors are demanding your work. And you, with practically every one of your paintings in your own hands, you have cornered the market. So if you will honor me by permitting me to act for you, I can guarantee that you will have no cause to regret it."

Stephen had listened to these remarks standing against the mantelpiece. He felt faint, on the verge of a bout of coughing which would expose the extremity of his condition. He straightened, by an effort of will. "I have neither the need nor the desire to sell my paintings."

Taken unawares by this reply, Tessier nevertheless recovered himself quickly. "Monsieur Desmonde — permit me to call you *cher maître* — you distress me. You have something of great value to give the world. You cannot bury it. Remember the parable in the Scriptures."

At the Biblical allusion coming from the shrewdest dealer in Paris, Stephen could barely repress the flicker of a smile. He said quietly: "No. If my work is good it will one day find its place. In the meantime, having lived with my paintings, I propose to die with them."

Desmonde's expression, strained yet indifferent, was strangely disconcerting. Is it pique, Tessier asked himself, because I once refused his work? No, he thought, this man is sincere. And, becoming more and more aware of the signs of illness in Stephen's face, a sudden understanding came to him.

"Monsieur Desmonde," he said, "I have no wish to importune you. I am a man of commerce, it is true. At the same time, I know beauty, and love it. This painting, which I examined with excitement and delight before you came in, is superb. And if you will

allow me to have it, at the price which you name, I give you my word of honor that within three months I will donate it to the Luxembourg Museum. Come now, you see that my motives are not altogether unworthy."

Stephen shook his head.

"You must permit me the final luxury of refusing you. At the same time, I will make you a promise. You have spoken of three months. Come back then . . . come to Cable Street, in Stepney. I don't think you will be disappointed."

My God, thought Tessier, he is really ill, he is going to die, and he knows it. A shiver went over him. But he smiled and exclaimed: "I accept. And now, I have taken up too much of your time." He saw that his visit must not be prolonged another moment. He held out his hand. *"Au revoir, cher maître."*

"Good-by."

With a sudden display of emotion, Tessier kissed Stephen on both cheeks, then he went out.

When the dealer had gone, Stephen allowed his cough to have its way. The spasm lasted several minutes, after which, bent double, he struggled to regain his breath. Then he leaned back against the mantel. It was in this attitude that Jenny found him as she came quietly into the room.

"Who was it, Stephen?"

"A man I once knew in Paris."

"What did he want?"

"Something he might have had a long time ago. He's coming back again, Jenny, in three months' time, to buy my pictures. You can trust him. He's not a bad sort."

She studied his face anxiously. "Oh, my dear, you are dead beat." She put a supporting arm around him. "Let me get you into bed."

He was about to submit; then, by a superhuman effort of the will, he forced himself erect.

"I think . . . first of all . . . I'll finish varnishing my *Thames. . . .*" He took a step forward, put his arm round Jenny's waist and stood looking at his work. A smile barely touched his lips. "You know . . . he really meant it when he said it was superb."

Chapter Fifteen

ON AN April afternoon in the year 1937, an elderly clergyman and a boy descended from a bus and by way of the Thames Embankment entered the quiet precincts of Millbank. The air, fresh yet mild, smelled deliciously of spring. In Westminster Gardens daffodils waved and tulips stood gaily at attention; upon the trim green lawns the chestnut trees, in flower, had spread a soft white carpet. The Thames shimmered in the sunshine. Against the blue, flecked by a fleece of clouds, the Abbey stood out in exquisite tracery. Beyond were the Houses of Parliament. The Rector, walking with young Stephen Desmonde, felt strangely stirred, despite the weight of years, by the beauty of the day.

The two came along the Embankment at a leisurely pace, for Bertram was slowed by rheumatism. Some fifty yards from the end of the street they crossed over and entered the Tate Gallery.

Few people were about; the long, high-ceilinged rooms held that echoing quietude which pleased Bertram most. They finally sat down in a gallery, fretted by sunshine, on the west side. Upon the opposite wall were three paintings. At these, the boy as in duty bound, his elder with remote and meditative vision, gazed. Presently, without removing his eyes, Bertram spoke.

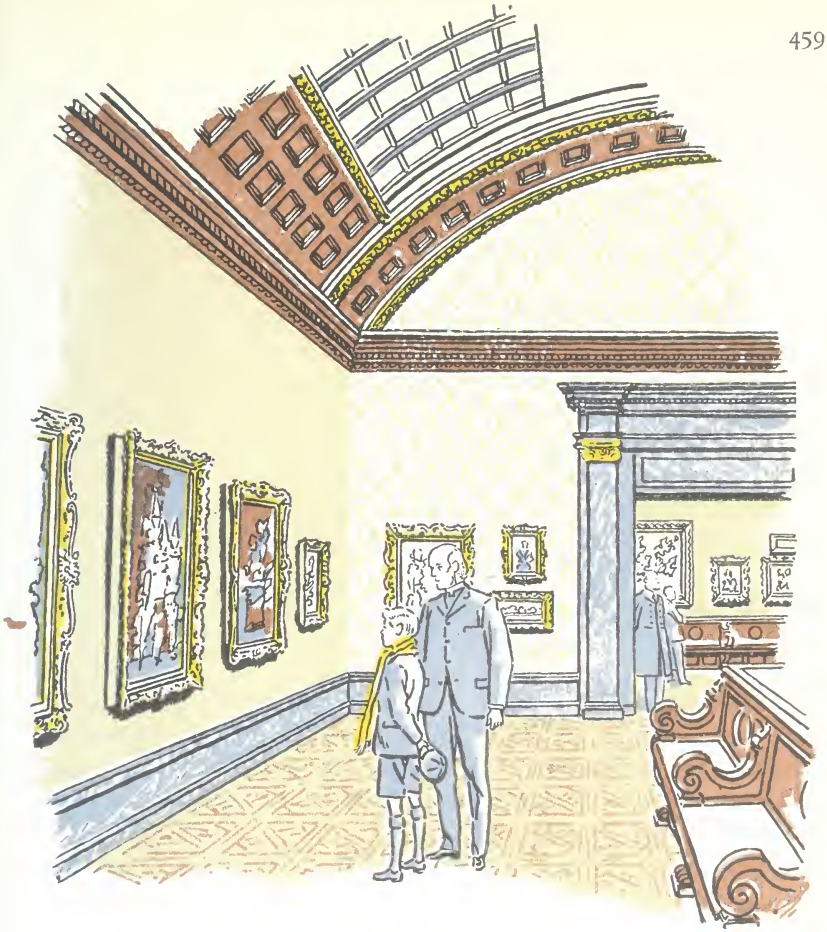
"You are settling down at Horsham? You like the school?"

"It's not at all bad, sir."

"The first year is always difficult. But you'll get into the swing of things. You've made some friends, I hope?"

"Yes, sir. There's a couple of boys that I'm chummy with."

The conversation, hauntingly reminiscent of his talks with David and the other Stephen, so many years ago, brought a strange pain to Bertram's heart. What an old man he was getting to be, so given over to dreaming that he mixed up the present with the past and sometimes, looking at this Stephen, fancied himself in company with his own dear son. The two were certainly alike — the living Stephen had the other's open brow and deep-blue eyes, the same proud set of the head upon the narrow shoulders.



"We expect fine things of you, my boy. You must do credit to your name. Are the lessons coming along?"

"Pretty fair, I think, sir. We had a test before the holidays. I did all right in English and Arithmetic."

A shadow crossed Bertram's mind; he scarcely could bring himself to ask the question. "Do they give you Drawing?"

"Yes, sir. But it seems I can't draw at all." Unconsciously, Bertram gave a little sigh of relief. His grandson continued, "But Mother said I must tell you I got full marks for Scripture Knowledge."

"Well done," Bertram murmured. Who could tell? Perhaps even now the hope of his life might be fulfilled. He laid his blue-veined fingers on the boy's hand and patted it approvingly.

Stephen rather enjoyed these not infrequent expeditions with his grandfather, but today, the beginning of the Easter vacation, after having been away from his mother for nine weeks, he was eager to see her. She would meet them at Waterloo Station, and take him home with her. He was about to inquire tactfully of Bertram what the time might be when a party of schoolgirls entered the room, under the escort of their mistress.

There were about a dozen of them, in dark-green skirts and blazers, straw hats with green ribbons. The mistress, in tweeds and flat-heeled shoes, drew up opposite Bertram and Stephen.

"And now, girls," she announced, "we come to the Desmondes, three representative paintings purchased in 1930. The first, entitled *Circus,* distinguished by marvelous color and composition, is of the artist's early French period. Note the grouping of the clowns and the manner in which a sense of movement is given to the figure of the young woman on the bicycle.

"The second painting, *The Blue Wrapper,* which I am sure you have seen reproduced many times, is a portrait of the artist's wife. Here you will find the freedom of design which characterized all Desmonde's work. The subject is neither pretty nor young, yet an extraordinary feeling of beauty is created.

"The third, and largest, painting was the last work accomplished by the artist, and is considered his finest. It is, as you see, a composition of the estuary of the Thames, showing all the crowded turbulent movement of the river. Desmonde was a great original artist who opened up a new era of expression."

Looking around at her pupils she asked briskly: "Any questions, class?"

One of the girls spoke up. "Is he dead, miss?"

"Yes, Doris. He died as a young man, almost unrecognized. But when we look at these works we know he did not live in vain."

When they had gone, clattering down the long gallery, Bertram, still immobile, maintained his baffled contemplation of the pictures. Stephen, his son, a great artist . . . yes, even the word

genius was now being used without reserve. There was no pride in him at the thought, but rather a strange bewildered sadness, and, thinking of the pain and disappointment of a lifetime crowned too late, he wondered if it had all been worth it. What was beauty, after all, that men should martyr themselves in its pursuit, die for it, like the saints of old? Peering hard at the canvases, he tried to discern their virtues. Regretfully, he shook his head. He could not do so. He bowed again to the opinion of the experts. The pictures remained to him as great an enigma as had been his son, in every action of his life, but most of all in the unrepentance of his end. He could never contemplate that last scene without a dull ache in his heart. In the gray morning, summoned by Glyn to the small back bedroom in Cable Street, he had found Stephen ghostly pale and barely breathing, speechless, but still with a pencil and a sketch block at his bedside. Bertram had tried to speak words of affection and consolation, but, as he did so, Stephen, writing weakly, had handed him a note: *Too bad I have never drawn you. You have a fine head.* And then, sunk in the pillows, he had begun to outline Bertram's profile on his block. A final portrait, for presently the pencil slipped from his grasp, the fingers were still. Then, while Bertram sat bowed and broken, Glyn, with a hard, set competence, had begun immediately to make a death mask of the gaunt, passionless face.

"For God's sake," he had cried out, "must you do that?"

"Yes," Glyn answered, "for art's sake. In the future this will be for many a source of faith and perseverance."

The funeral had been at Stillwater, and Stephen was at peace there now, within the church, beside his ancestor the Crusader.

With an effort Bertram roused himself. "Come, my boy. You shall have an ice before we meet your mother."

When they arrived at the station, there, waiting for them under the clock, was young Stephen's mother, neat and unobtrusive in her black serge costume. The boy went toward her quickly. She bent a little, held him closely in her arms.

Standing a little distance off, the Rector couldn't help noticing that it was a loving reunion. And his son's widow . . . she was

really a modest, decent little creature, living now with her sister in the better part of Margate. There was an increasing income from the sale of Stephen's pictures. He felt sure the black she wore was a sign of mourning — she must have cared much more than he had believed. They were coming toward him now.

"I do hope Stevie's been a good boy."

"Very good." But he wished she would not abbreviate the name.

"It's kind of you to take him out."

"And good of you to let me do so."

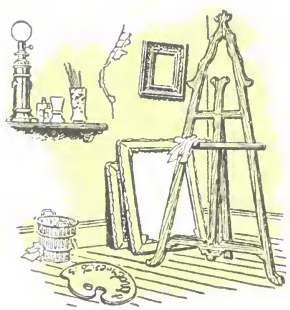
Jenny looked meaningly at her son, and he said:

"Thank you very much, sir, for a splendid time."

They shook hands. He saw them go off together, arm in arm. He sighed and consulted his watch. His train was due to leave in fifteen minutes. Caroline most probably would meet him at the junction, come home with him in the bus. Since Julia's death two years ago, she seemed to worry less. And she had made him comfortable in the Little Rectory; although only a bungalow, it was most convenient, and warm in the winter. Yes, a good soul, Carrie.

He found a third-class corner seat on the train — gone were the days of traveling first — and, when the engine started off, settled himself to read. But he suddenly felt tired. Leaning back, he closed his eyes. Was he asleep? Or listening to the pounding of the wheels, which seemed to repeat, over and over again, the name of his dead son?

Night fell, the train went rattling on, through the dark landscape of the night.



A. J. Cronin

It was in 1930 that Dr. Archibald Joseph Cronin, a successful physician of 33, found time heavy on his hands during a much-needed rest in the Scottish Highlands, and decided to lighten it by writing a novel. Though he had never produced a word of fiction before, the result was that resounding triumph, *Hatter's Castle*. It has since been followed by such distinguished best-sellers as *The Stars Look Down, The Citadel, The Keys of the Kingdom, The Green Years, Adventures in Two Worlds* and *Beyond This Place,* the last two of which were selections of Reader's Digest Condensed Books.

Dr. Cronin was born in Cardross, Scotland, studied medicine at the University of Glasgow and served, during the First World War, as a surgeon sublieutenant in the Royal Volunteer Naval Reserve. After the war, having completed his interrupted studies, he practiced for four years in South Wales — the scene of *The Stars Look Down* and *The Citadel* — and was then appointed by the Ministry of Mines to make a study of pulmonary diseases in the British coal fields. He had settled down to a substantial practice in London's West End when fate, and an irrepressible talent for writing, took a hand in his career.

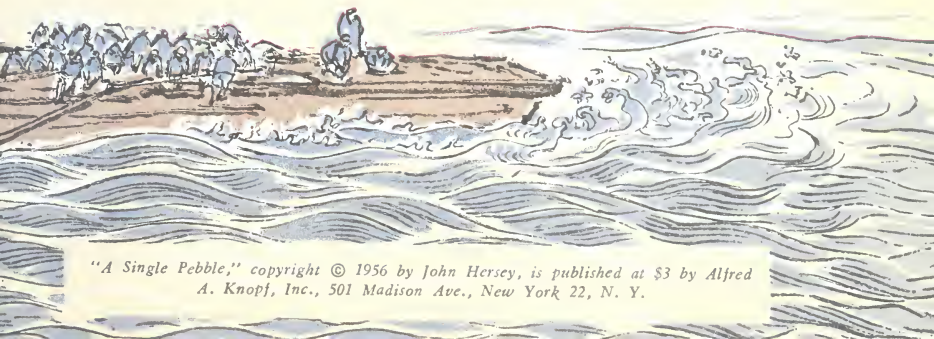
Dr. and Mrs. Cronin, who were married in 1921 and have three sons, are now living in Switzerland.

Illustrations by Chen Chi

A SINGLE PEBBLE

A COMPLETE SHORT NOVEL BY

JOHN HERSEY



"A Single Pebble," copyright © 1956 by John Hersey, is published at $3 by Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 501 Madison Ave., New York 22, N. Y.

A Single Pebble is the dramatic and moving story of a young American engineer sent to China in the Twenties to survey the mighty Yangtze River. Emotional tension mounts as he is drawn into the timeless, unchanging life of the people of the junk on which he travels — among them Old Pebble, leader of the trackers who tow the junk, a powerful yet passive man, wholly dedicated to the river; and Su-ling, the owner's young wife, who voices the myth and poetry of the savage Yangtze. The journey reaches its climax in the cliff-hemmed depths of the river's most dangerous gorge. There, amid the pounding excitement of a struggle for survival, East meets West in a rare moment of deep understanding.

In this short novel, presented at full length, John Hersey, one of America's most honored authors, gives us a parable of our times worthy to stand beside his classic *A Bell For Adano* and *Hiroshima.*

PART ONE The Junk

I BECAME an engineer. I found my way into hydraulics, and not many years along, while still a youthful dam surveyor, I was chosen by the big contracting firm for which I worked to go to China and study the river called by the Chinese "the Great," the Yangtze, to see whether it would make sense for my company to try to sell the Chinese government a vast power project in the river's famous gorges.

This was half my life ago, in the century's and my early twenties; the century and I were both young and sure of ourselves then.

I spent a year preparing myself for the trip. I applied myself to spoken Mandarin Chinese and got a fair fluency in it. I read all I could find on the Yangtze; I learned of its mad rise and fall, of the floods it loosed each year, killing unnumbered people and ruining widespread crops; of its fierce rapids and beautiful gorges, and of its endless, patient traffic of hundreds of junks towed upstream and rowed down by human motive power.

Even after my studies, though, I could scarcely visualize this storied, treacherous river, and being an ambitious young engineer I could only think of it as an enormous sinew, a long strip of raw, naked, cruel power waiting to be tamed. I had much yet to learn.

I took passage on a steamer to Shanghai, and after an impatient month in that transplanted Western city I was able to talk my way onto a British gunboat, the *Firefly,* which was going upriver

as far as Ichang, at the gate of the gorges, on a patrol such as British ships were then allowed by treaty to make on certain Chinese rivers on behalf of British business interests in the interior.

The thousand miles from Shanghai to Ichang were long. The landscape was flat; the river was enormously wide and sluggish. Where was the Yangtze's brutal power? I was let down. We made no stops, and everything on board was British and regular, and I witnessed a riverbank China but did not feel it.

We arrived at length in Ichang. I went immediately, as I had been told to do, to our consul in that city, and because bandits and revolutionaries were said to be harassing the few flat-bottomed steamboats then trading in the gorges above Ichang, he urged me to go upriver not by steamer but by junk, as he thought I would travel unnoticed that way and would have more leisure for my study. And so with his help I arranged a passage with a thin, gaunt junk owner whose Chinese I could understand quite well, for he was a Szechuan man, from Wanhsien, and the Szechuanese dialect is not too far from pure Mandarin.

I was eager indeed to go aboard his boat.

It was the junk's cook who first colored my whole new view of China.

When I made my deal with the owner, he warned me that he wished to start away early the next morning, and I boarded his vessel, with my bedroll and a single Gladstone bag, just after dawn of the following day.

The boat was a *ma-yang-tzŭ,* one of the great upriver junks, a hundred and two feet in length over all, nineteen feet in beam, made entirely of the tough cypress of the Wanhsien district, with a turret-built hull divided by strong bulkheads into fourteen cargo compartments, and carrying on deck abaft the mast its living quarters, a big shelter for the crew and a cabin for the owner on the stern: a craft well designed forty centuries ago.

All appeared to be ready. The cargo of cotton bales was in the watertight compartments below the loose-planked decks; the crew was fully hired on; lines were clear and all that was needed was handy.

But at the very moment when the owner gave the order to cast off from our spar moorings in the foul muck at the riverbank, the cook cried out that he had yet to take delivery of a supply of *pai-ts'ai,* fresh white Chinese cabbage, at the market place. Amid shouts and laughter he jumped from the junk and rushed along the staked-up plank bridge to dry ground, holding in his hand a bag of the owner's coppers. He was a stocky man, with a clean-shaven head, a round face, black eyes very close together, and skin like buffed candlewax. He glanced back at us, grinning, when he reached the shore, and waved the bag of coppers and made the coins tinkle. He looked a rogue.

I thought the errand would take fifteen minutes. But all the crew, I saw, sat down or lay down, and the men occupied themselves, as if for all the day, with gossip, lice-picking, gambling, and snoozing.

A quarter of an hour passed, and a half, and a whole. I was alert; I kept watching the riverbank and the rows of mat huts

that crowded to the verge of the muck at the bank. I grew weary, tensely waiting for the cook.

The owner, I saw, was easy. He was playing a game of little bamboo "stones" with a Chinese girl whom I took to be his daughter; later I learned that she was his wife.

As nine o'clock was left behind, the preposterousness of the delay overwhelmed me, and I went in a kind of temper to the owner and said that I thought he should sign on another cook and weigh spars and be off.

The owner had a haggard, fine-wrinkled face, which had been eroded, one could guess, not so much by weather as by fiercely running thoughts of profit and loss. From his chin hung a black, sparse beard of hardly more than a hundred hairs — a token of dignity and idleness. He turned this face up to me and mildly said, in a phrase I was to hear often spoken by the Chinese with a shrug and a look of resignation, "There is no way."

So, frustrated in my Western hurry — I *was* in a hurry, with hundreds of miles of hydro-electric promises ahead of me — I lay down on the deck and tried to be patient, listening to the owner sucking at his teeth and to the low, sweet murmur of his young wife's dutiful laughter when he spoke to her words I could not make out.

The time shuffled along. Bursts of conversation and sudden little arguments came from the clump of trackers forward, but they seemed content and laughed often. The hour came and went for the noonday meal, and because the cook had gone ashore it seemed evident that there would be no such lunch: for who would fix it?

At about two o'clock the owner's young wife came, carrying a handleless cup and a pot with a quilted cover, to where I was still lying disconsolate. She poured me some tea without speaking; she looked at my face openly, but she seemed afraid of me. She went back to her husband then and their game went on.

I seemed to be held in a prison of others' patience; I was wild, but I lay still.

It was nearly five in the evening when the cook came aboard. He did not have the cabbages. He did have, in one hand, holding them

upside down by their bound legs, four live chickens, and in his other hand he had a big jug of vegetable oil. He was cheerful and possibly drunk; the owner, who was also cheerful, greeted him quietly; the owner's wife acknowledged his slight bow with a slight bow; the crew welcomed him with jokes and friendly curses; and only I seethed. Needless to say, it was too late to set out on the river that night. We stayed at the mooring, and I slept badly among nocturnal cries, coughs, spittings, songs, and sounds of the loading of coal by hand into the bunkers of the *Firefly* out in the stream.

We started up the river at dawn the next day.

I carried over into the journey's first morning, like an aching muscle strained the day before, the painful knot of impatience that I had built up while waiting for the cook. These Chinese aboard the junk did everything so slowly and carelessly! — and with such infuriating cheerfulness. Though they had begun the noisy work of weighing moorings just as the first incendiary hints of sunrise had lit up the mists around the strange pyramidal hill across from Ichang, it was nearly ten o'clock by my watch before we finally cleared the pack of moored junks on the city's lap and began to move upstream. I was outraged by the deliberation of the owner. He was setting out on a nearly two-hundred-mile voyage with a cargo worth two hundred taels, perhaps more; surely upstream speed would mean downriver profit for him. Yet he seemed not to care whether he made twenty miles or one in his first day's progress. Once in a while he would rise up in a fury of shouting at his crew; then he would subside to his tea and his game of "stones" with his young wife, and it seemed that his outbursts were a matter of form, almost of ceremony.

I noticed the owner's wife more closely than I had the day before, when she had seemed just a rather shabby, though somehow bright and even coarsely pretty young woman of the river. Now I saw that the brightness came from her eyes; when her husband stood up in his formal rampages, her large black-pupiled eyes took in more than his exaggerated presiding gestures and shouting rushes. She looked in the faces of the crew. She saw the men. Her eyes were wide open, figuratively as well as actually,

it seemed to me, and they looked wiser than the rest of her young face seemed to warrant.

By mid-morning my irritability, like the mists on the river which were gradually burnt off by the April sun, was dissipated by the all-melting view into the heart of which we were being carried on a fine breeze by our big bamboo-ribbed lugsail. All the way from Shanghai, a thousand miles by river, the terrain had been flat and brown. Now, in a soft spring morning laden with the fragrance of dewy grass and numberless violets, we moved in a northerly direction across what seemed an inland lake nearly three quarters of a mile wide, with sun-washed mountains along the west bank and low purple hills to the east.

Then all at once, on the left, a cleft in the massif showed itself, and there, narrowed to two hundred yards, flowing between rounded limestone mountains, was the Great River in the first of its wondrous gorges. The surprise was overwhelming.

It was here at the mouth of Yellow Cat Gorge that I first saw the trackers at work, as we had too little wind to sail against the constricted current; and it was here, therefore, that I first noticed the head tracker. As the lugsail was taken in and the junk was rowed toward the left bank by a squad of trackers, I noticed that one of them, a lumpy, broad-faced fellow with a shaven head, who was dressed in new blue cotton pants and a drab ragged jacket, took the lead in all that was done. From his powerful larynx to his square feet, this man, whom the owner addressed with a nickname, Old Pebble, seemed to be one whole, rhythm-bound muscle. Everything he did had rhythm. As he gave orders on board the junk, he kicked his feet on the slapping unbolted planks of the deck; he punctuated what he said with tongue-clicks; his hands moved in rope-pulling gestures, all in time with his cadenced speech. His head was spherical, and he had the crow's feet of cheerfulness all the way from his narrow eyes back to his ears. I have never been able to tell with certainty how old a Chinese is; I would guess that this one was in his mid-thirties. At any rate, the "Old" of his nickname was surely an affectionate term; he seemed young and strong. I saw that he wore a silver ring, and although his hands had no more grace than monkey-wrenches, he had let his finger-

nails grow rather long, in the old style, evidently to show that he was of the boatmen's nobility.

That evening, after we had made perhaps ten miles between amazing limestone battlements, turrets, and buttresses, towed every inch of the way by the chanting trackers, with the one called Old Pebble out in front, singing weird rhythmic melodies — that evening, when we were securely moored in a little eddying cove at the head of Yellow Cat Gorge, I spoke to the head tracker. He received me openly and without deference.

I began to question him about his life.

"I pull the towline," he said, and stopped, as if to say: What more is there? What more could there be?

But, I asked, what of the future?

"I have very little," he said, and he spoke as if having little were the greatest fortune, and the greatest buffer against the future, that a man could wish.

Again I tried to ask him what his goal was.

"In my spare time ashore I drink wine," he said. "I never fight when I get drunk. I just talk when I'm drunk and lean against a wall and go to sleep. I hate fighting, and really no one wants to fight me. I am an 'old good.' I don't save money, I spend it on my friends. I buy them wine. I buy friendship. I save friendship. But some of the men on the river are no good. If they know you have money, they want you to gamble with jumping sticks or cards. If you refuse, they form a circle around you and threaten you."

He cleared his throat and spat over the side into the Great River, and he seemed very pleased with himself.

"What do you want?" I asked.

"I have no home; my body is my home," he said. "But I am an old good. I shall stay on boats, and there will always be someone to hire me, and when I am old, all my brothers in the boatmen's guild and all the captains on the riverside who know me will give me a few coppers in payment for the friendship I have hoarded for them. I will have plenty. I will have a fine funeral."

This was the way he spoke. At the time I wanted to believe him, and mostly did, though I thought him full of guile; in my Occi-

dental complacency I then considered all Chinese liars, anyhow. I guess I wanted to believe that he was a simple, good man, but I was troubled by his obvious inner enjoyment of his account of himself; from time to time he had pursed his lips, so that his face had looked shrewd, as if he had been saying to himself, "I am the grandest liar in the world, and see how I have this stupid foreign boy on my towline!" I thought he might be dramatizing himself as a poor, pure-hearted wanderer, one of Heaven's minstrels, to me, a foreigner who asked questions. I could not imagine that a young, vigorous, and cheerful man could live without distant goals: wealth, family, and a good name widely known.

THE FOLLOWING day, the second of our passage, we moved through a landscape of such wildness as I had never before even imagined. Not far above the cove where we had moored for the night, the river took an abrupt turn to the right, beyond which we entered the trough called Lampshine Gorge. On the bank on our right were steep, giddying limestone cliffs crowned with soft-formed, many-wintered rocks, while on the left, on the shelves of less precipitous but still formidable mountains, picturesque villages and temples rested. Once, high on an apparently inaccessible cliff, we saw huge characters painted on the rock, and the owner read them to me: "The hills are bright, the waters dark." Near the upper mouth of the gorge, on the eastern side, a narrow, isolated pinnacle of limestone called, as I was told, the Pillar of Heaven rose nearly two thousand feet; one could imagine that it did, indeed, support the crystal ceiling of the day.

At length we erupted from the gorge. The limestone formations fell away, and we moved all at once into a region of plutonic rocks. In a valley nearly a mile wide huge boulders of gneiss and granite, larger by far than our junk, lay strewn about, and straight across the line of the river, relenting only enough to grant it a shallow channel, curious dykes of greenstone and porphyry rose up out of the other stone. It was a primeval landscape, and it seemed to have been arranged by some force of fury. I was deeply moved and humbled by the sight of the trackers scrambling like tiny, purposeful crickets over the rough and intractable banks. We were

all hopeless insects in this setting. My career, engineering, seemed only nonsense here. Nothing — absolutely nothing — could be done by man's puny will for this harsh valley littered with gigantic rocks.

By evening I was worn out with awe and small-stirring fears, for the currents of the river, wrenched and twisted by hidden boulders and sunken dams of porphyry, had sucked at our huge junk and made it tremble and bob as if it had been a mere autumn leaf on the water; and when, after the evening meal in the softness of twilight, some slapstick began to be set up by the cook and the head tracker, while the other men laughed around them, I was irritated. I felt that my boatmates were men without feeling, if men at all. How could they have traveled all day through this land of prehistory only looking forward to an evening of pranks and cackling? The cook and the head tracker jumped about burlesquing the formal ritual of jugglers and magicians, chanting the nonsense-rhymes such men use, and waving their arms and looking mysterious; these two excelled in the universal funny talk of gangs of men — companionable abuse, loving cruelty — and they were making verbal monsters of each other, and their friends roared.

I was sitting cross-legged on some matting, aft, near the owner and his wife. I was close enough to them to hear, now and then, her laughter, which was so low and soft that it seemed to be hardly more than some sort of indulgence — smiling pushed just over the edge into audibility. The owner laughed hard with the rest.

Suddenly the pretended mockery volleying between the two men seemed to become serious. They jumped up, and in the flickering, soft light of paper-chimneyed oil lanterns hanging from the curved overhead ribs of the big fore cabin, their faces glistened reddish and furious; their eyes popped. It was impossible to guess what had suddenly made the banter of these two vigorous men turn earnest — unless it was the same fury as had caused the disorder in the great rocks of the wide valley.

"You are a turtle, the son of two turtles, a bastard turtle, you!" the cook shouted.

"You are a bastard, I shame your mother!" the head tracker answered in what seemed to be real bitterness.

What made the quick and ugly change of mood in the two men eerie was that the mood of the trackers around them changed not at all. They laughed still, as if witnessing more of what they had been seeing, and they laughed no less but no more.

I stood up, for this had turned from an annoyance into a minor spectacle; it may be that some of my own feelings, pent all day, were finding a vicarious outlet.

Close beside me I became aware that the owner's wife was standing, too, in fierce enjoyment of the encounter. Her eyes flashed as she looked at me in the lantern light.

THE NEXT morning I awoke feverish, and for four days I lay sick on my bedroll on the planks of the conning deck, glimpsing only now and then of the passing terrain a rough cliff through the forward arch of the mat roof, seen upside down as I rolled back my head.

High above me on his platform of two planks which partially roofed the deck, the after-helmsman stood, and occasionally I saw his gown or his arm as he sluggishly moved the junk's immensely long tiller. He was a silent, bitter, thin man, whose duties on an upriver voyage were negligible, because the great forward bow sweep, manned by a dozen men, did most of the steering against the current, and I soon thought of the helmsman as a mechanical fixture, a man scarcely there.

I lived to sounds: the beat of the trackers' signaling drum forward of the mast, Old Pebble's faraway chanting and the pained rhythmic cry of the trackers, orders shouted from the junk, the chopping of vegetables, the loud sipping of tea — all the noises of upstream progress; and always along the flanks of our craft the murmuring of the urgent river.

I feared typhoid, but now from this distance I can guess that I was ill of mystification and disappointment, and of a churning up of inner forces I had never known. I had approached the river as a dry scientific problem; I found it instead an avenue along which human beings moved whom I had not the insight, even though

I had the vocabulary, to understand. What bothered me, and was incomprehensible to me, was their indolence, their lack of drive, their indifference to goals I held valuable — even to the physical goal toward which we moved without haste, the mid-river port of Wanhsien. So far as I could see, these people had no desire to get ahead. Living day after compartmented day on this primordial river seemed to have done this to them. The central idea of my energetic country meant nothing to them, I thought. Since I had pinned my hopes for China, for an engineered China, upon that idea, I was prostrated, I suppose, as I floated through the awesome terrains of the wild Great River, by what I imagined to have been a terrible discovery — as well as by some trivial germ of that district.

The owner's wife tended me. Her name was Su-ling. She was a nurse of such delicacy — only hinting gentleness, outwardly brusque and rather impersonal — that I felt the impact of her compassion only in the days of my convalescence; but that came later. In the first days of my fever, she would bring me tea and sometimes broth that the cook, she casually told me, had made especially for me. Now and then she gave me news and anecdotes of our trip, none of which really interested me, since a grippal ache in my head and arms and legs took most of my angry attention. She told me once, I remember, that it had required the better part of two days to negotiate Pierced Mountain Gorge and the open valley above it, for there had been a heavy "down-wind" opposing us; her words gave me my only sense of the passage of our craft through days and air and water.

She never touched me, for she was careful, prudish almost, when she was near me. She often put steaming towels on my face to ease the dry discomfort of my feverish skin, letting the hot damp cloths fall across my brow or cheeks and taking care not to brush my face with her fingers. I wondered, when I was somewhat recovered, what was behind all this. Did it come from what she felt about me? Or from fear of her husband, the owner? Or had she a feeling that I, a white-skinned, long-nosed foreigner in that valley of flat-nosed people, was somehow peculiar and foul? — for I remembered as I lay on the deck of the junk how an otherwise intelligent college

friend of mine from Alabama had told me once that "niggers have a smell that's different from white people's" and that was fulsome in white nostrils. Was I a fetid, loathsome object to these Chinese? This possibility laid a new deposit on the sense of shock I was storing up, for at home I had been bred to Western superiority, and had thought of China as the home of the backward Chink, the Heathen Chinee who followed the wooden plow, the perilous yellow man, a creature so low that the gates of the sweet land of liberty had clanked shut in his face — someone, at best, to be given a helping hand. Could this simple girl look down on me?

She was barely twenty, I guess. Certainly her husband was twice her age. She had a slender frame yet gave an impression of sturdiness, having wrists that looked good and strong, and a firm neck; I suppose she had often sculled sampans. Her figure was only to imagine, for she wore blue quilted cotton gowns or, of the same upholstered material, trousers wrapped with cloth anklets and jackets buttoned down the side with cloth knots, and thus she was but a bundle to see; yet I, at my age, was well able to supply the guesses that would grace her straight body beneath with goodnesses enough. Her face was overcast with a shadow, with a sadness that I frequently saw on the broad faces of the people who lived on the Great River, a sadness that came to haunt me — of patience, of acceptance; a sadness that seemed to deepen whenever Su-ling glanced at the turbulence of the currents through which we passed. This inner melancholy seemed to be gathered about one corner of her mouth, on the left side, which was often drawn tight with a sweet stoic tensity. Her eyes, on the other hand, as I have said, were bright and keen and gay, and when she laughed, as many a time of day she did, they glistened and nearly canceled out the cramp of woe at her mouth. Her hair was coal-black, oily, and not as clean as it might have been — but even that in due course I condoned.

The dreadful idea that she might have contempt for me just because of my foreignness, my otherness, made me try with special zeal, when I had the vigor to do it, to kindle those eyes of hers with amusement and pleasure.

I began to be a little afraid of the men on the boat. I had discovered myself an outsider. Remember, I was only a boy; twenty-four years old. I was young then. I was young. It was good to be young, but who could have told me that?

I became lonely and frightened, yet I remember my convalescence of those days as a poignantly happy period, which I prolonged by will and deceit, feigning misery after it had left me.

The owner came to me in his black coat which was lined with leopard skin and, sucking at his teeth, gave me official permission to submit to his wife's nursing, though I had willingly been doing so for two or three days before he bestowed these oral credentials on me. Thus I was made aware of a watchful eye.

My great surprise of those days was finding the deep, astonishing well of understanding and learning that the river girl had. Su-ling said one afternoon, in her musical murmur, which by then was as pleasant to me as the constant purling of the brown currents against the cypress planks of the junk, that her master had told her that she might recount to me legends and truths of the Ten-Thousand-Mile River, if I wished to hear them, and she seemed to imply that my ignorance of the Yangtze, which I had betrayed with questions, was pitiful and shameful and should be rectified. I urged her to educate me, and was rewarded with extraordinary treasures, poems of Li Po and Tu Fu and myths and dreams and histories. She told me that afternoon, with the sun slanting across her face as she squatted outside the door of the stern cabin, while I lay near her in the open area of the conning deck abaft the great mat arch of the crew's cabinway, a tale of tyranny, of the three generals of the Western Kingdom who swore blood brotherhood in the peach-blossom garden of Yang Yuan, and of how after many battles the brother Chang issued an order to the tailors roundabout his camp to make uniforms for his entire army in three days, or perish, and the tailors were horrified at this impossible task, and some of them crept, carrying scissors, to the general's room at night, and his eyes were open and moved about, frightening them, yet he snored, and hearing his heavy breathing they pierced his eyes with their scissors and cut off his head and fled to the Eastern Kingdom; and that, Su-ling said, with quiet certitude, was why tailor's scissors

were still required to have square ends all over China. She told her tales, she recited her verse, slowly, as if deeply impressed with my stupidity, and now and then, when I could not follow her words, she interpreted with marvelous pantomime, giving me the word for scissors, for example, with a lovely crosscutting motion of her forearms, her leaf-like hands taking the part of blades, her bright gaze washing me with her desire for my improvement. I was amazed at the range of her memory, and its sharp edge, and I began to suffer from ridiculous feelings of inferiority. I strained to remember some lines from one of *my* poets; well, there was Whitman — *when in the dooryard lilacs . . . when lilacs last in the dooryard bloomed* . . . How could I render "lilacs," even in pantomime? I protested to myself that my knowledge was useful; *I* could help to assuage poverty; my knowledge might help one day to make electric light bulbs cast their healing, teaching glow into every mat shed clinging to these poverty-washed riverbanks. What was idle verse to that?

Why did this girl, who gave me such delight, fill me also with anger?

Now ONE evening toward the end of my illness I lay on my bedroll watching the crew, and I saw that the head tracker, who had told me that first evening in Yellow Cat Gorge of his scorn for money and belongings and of his hoarding nothing but friendship, was after all able to be greedy just like other men.

We were spar-moored against some big rocks in an eddy between ports. A number of the trackers settled down to a gambling game of jumping sticks, which the head tracker was not obliged, or threatened, or even cajoled to join, but to which he nevertheless did drift, wearing, at first, an indifferent look. On watching his face, however, I began to see in it an alertness to the gaming that later turned into a frantic hungry stare at each man's turn and the exchange of coppers that followed. Finally, squatting on his hams and demanding a turn himself, he took the bamboo receptacle which held the stiff bundle of marked chopsticks from his neighbor, and he jounced the container and rattled the sticks in his own eccentric, jerky rhythms, behaving as if he had in his hands some

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remarkable talisman, some mysterious cylinder of fate; his eyes were those of a cat. He consistently won. When the others threw their coppers on the planks before him, he reached down with his hard hands, flicked up the coins with one of his long fingernails, palmed them, sounded them one against another occasionally to make sure that this one or that one was not a dross counterfeit, and then dropped them with ceremonious satisfaction into the cloth purse that like a precious codpiece dangled between his thighs on a drawstring from his waistband. It was a disgusting spectacle of rapacity. Now and then he hummed in a thin high whine a passage from one of the trackers' songs that only he could sing, as if to assert, by a mere hint, his habitual dominance over these other men of burden, and I could see their growing resentment, not of his winning, for there must always have been a winner before whose feet the congenital losers would be compelled to lay down their entire tangible worth, but rather of his too evident greed, his hypnotic plundering of their coppers. The game broke up in an argument, after two or three of the men hysterically accused him of having cheated. At this the head tracker, showing a sudden contempt for the coins that meant so much to the gamblers and until that moment had seemed so important to him, stood up still cursing the other men, stepped to the rail, unslung the purse from the blue cotton cinch of his trousers, opened its throat, and, pinching the bottom of the little loaded bag, disdainfully dropped all the money into the whispering river.

The angry talk subsided; a chill fell on the group; all were appalled — I more than any of them, I believe, for I had wanted to believe Old Pebble when he had told me that the only thing that mattered to him was friendship. Yet the other men on the junk did not seem to hold this frightful gesture against the head tracker for long; within an hour they were all merrily laughing and comradely together over some nauseating white rice brandy, called *pai-chia-erh,* and Old Pebble seemed to be regarded as the best fellow of all.

I SAT up, looking at the view. I felt much better but pretended to be weak. Su-ling told me that the gorge we were entering had a

curious name, Ox-Liver Horse-Lungs Gorge, and with a small whole hand she pointed at some stalactites, high up on the face of a cliff at the entrance door of the defile, which could be imagined to have the shapes of animal entrails; from these, she said, the unromantic place-name derived. The Old Big, as the trackers called the owner, sat on his haunches outside the door of his cabin, sucking at a hubble-bubble pipe and mostly occupied with tending it, occasionally nodding and smiling benignly at me, for he seemed satisfied with the instruction I was getting.

The morning was such as to give us pure delight. The sky was of a rich blue, softly streaked with veins of mist, so that it seemed alive, as if it were one enormous perfect over-arching petal of the universe. The mountains on either side of the river threw up red and dun and black and green masses against the blue, shapes of infinite variety, mystery, and majesty. Into the still air smoke arose in straight pale-blue shafts from tiny villages set high on the ramparts of the gorge. Here and there a plum tree or a cherry tree stood dressed in full blossom, a breathtaking immobilized explosion of color against a dark hillside. A whited pagoda, like a hand-carved object of ivory, was set on a headland at the top of the gorge. We were enveloped by sounds: the bird-world's praise of April, Old Pebble's whole-tone melodies and the boom of the trackers' drum, Su-ling's gentle murmuring laughter, the liquid music of the owner's pipe, and the endless whispered story of the Great River's swirling waters. The cook was frying vegetables, forward, and now and then a halo of pungent, appetizing fragrance hung about my head. I felt a marvelous, thrilling, full-blooded keenness of the senses — not just the quickening of life that comes with recovery from an illness, but something more, a feeling of peacefulness, well-being, and optimism.

I remember with startling vividness a few moments from that morning, moments of a wonderful sun-bathed clarity, in which nothing of life-changing importance took place, but which contained, for me, as I remember them, marvels and miracles of sight and sound and smell.

I was watching the trackers. These laborers fascinated me, and I had the habit of sitting by the hour observing them, while they

scrambled from rock to rock on the riverbank, straining frightfully at their halters and dividing their heavy work evenly between them; or while they moved slowly, step by chanted step, along a level towing bund; or while they crept lynx-footed along a ledge on the wall of one of the gorges, hauling the clumsy junk against the powerful current. Their work had a long tradition behind it, as the fluted places on obstructing boulders proved, where tow ropes had dragged across the rocks for so many centuries that they had worn grooves — stone filed away by braided bamboo! The trackers, doing the work of animals, sustained their hard hours by listening to antique melodies and fantasies which the head tracker constantly sang as he, too, tugged at the top end of the towline. They marked time for his songs with a repeated unison cry at the moment when all of them together planted each footstep: "Ayah! . . . Ayah! . . ." This rhythmic work-cry had an indescribably poignant sound. The head tracker's formal title as a crewman was Noise Suppressor. With a thread of sweet song he was supposed to suppress the groan-shout that marked each painful step. He sang songs of an incongruous beauty, that were like dreams — of palaces and of roasted doves' wings and of the daughter of the mist laying her cheek and her love on a prince's pillow; while they, hauling, protested: "Ayah! . . . Ayah! . . ."

Old Pebble's voice was amazing; its range was as wide as that of the strange songs he sang — from a full-throated bass bellow to a delicate falsetto. The voice sounded the zest of the man, for delight seemed to be his main trait. His senses were obviously all at work, and he seemed to be forever on the search for new feelings, for new things to do, for new ways to lighten the endless work of his fellow men.

In those moments of which I am thinking, I was watching and listening. The cook was monotonously humming; he had been drunk the night before. On the foredeck, the bow steersman, between grunted commands to the dozen men fighting the huge flattened treetrunk of the bow sweep which steered the junk in the twisting currents, had been loudly telling the cook stories of heroic cheaters and frauds among river pilots.

Suddenly the trackers' drum aboard the boat, just forward of

the mast, uttered some kind of warning. I could feel the junk sway sluggishly. I peered over the gunwale. The trackers had halted. The tow rope seemed to be snagged on a rock under the water.

In an instant Old Pebble slipped out of his harness, stripped off his clothes, and plunged into the terrible brown water. He vanished.

"He crawls on the rocks on the bottom," Su-ling softly said to me.

I thought of him as some kind of glistening crustacean down in that turbulence. He almost seemed to belong underwater; he *was* a riverman. The water slid along. I smelled boiling vegetable oil. The trackers leaned forward on their halters. The drum kept up a steady slow beat, seeming to say: wait, wait, wait, wait, wait. . . . What was it like in those depths, for a pebble on the bottom? I was not anxious. A very long time seemed to pass. I felt the gracious warmth of the sun on my face. I was close to Su-ling. For an instant I saw a flashing shiny something at the edge of a patch of froth. The junk shuddered. The bow steersman shrieked and with a groan the men on the big sweep shoved it hard over, and the nose of the junk swung out into the stream, and the tow rope broke water with a long, sighing swish, and Old Pebble was lifted waist-high out of the water, hanging from the bamboo line; he swung along it hand over hand to the rocky beach, shouting a wild exultant melody. I felt inexpressibly happy. The cook brought a pot of tea aft to us. I looked at the magical landscape. The naked man on the rocks, sweeping the water off his skin with the flats of his hands, was shouting abuse at the bow steersman; the cook cried out from beside us, with a beaming face, that the head tracker was an unmentionable horror of a turtle. I glanced at Su-ling. Her eyes were on me, and she smiled and shrugged, as if, it seemed, to acknowledge grudgingly the marvelousness of human existence.

Was ever anyone so happy as I at that moment?

I was young then, and the world I lived in was small and easy.

I looked again at Su-ling. She was gazing at the shore. The head tracker was already in his clothes and back on the line and was

singing a tragic song. And I saw in Su-ling's eyes unmistakable signs that she loved him.

PROBABLY this discovery should not have surprised me. What did surprise me most was my own reaction to it.

I remember that the following day was rainy. The rain was misty and vague, yet penetrating and bothersome, like the murmuring of a restless crowd all around when one is caught in it and cannot move. The drizzle did not seem to fall but rather to hang about us, as if the gorge had been filled to the brim with a cool and almost weightless liquid.

I lay melancholy under the great mat arch of the fore cabinway, waiting with fierce concentration for the door of the owner's cabin, at the very stern, to open, whence, I imagined, Su-ling would finally emerge and come to tell me stories of the river.

For hour after hour the door did not open. The trackers, unfortunate creatures, were given no respite in honor of the rain; they were out in it, hauling us, and incessantly their cries, in an ambiguous heartfelt tone that might have expressed either ecstasy or agony, or both at once, came to us through the dismal air: "Ayah! . . . Ayah! . . . ," while the head tracker wove melodies of an incongruous haunting gaiety in and out, in and out. I lay and watched the cabin door. It remained shut. I was sad. My watch had stopped running; perhaps dampness had got into it. I felt terribly lost without it, as if time no longer passed, as if the hours no longer moved without the little wheel-like thing in my pocket for them to roll along on; it seemed to me that we might be suspended forever in mid-morning, like the mist drops around us in mid-air, while the trackers and the river might pull in vain against each other, so that we would be caught hanging in both time and space.

The door opened, but for a long time no one came out. Then Su-ling came out with a pot of tea.

She came straight across the wet deck to where I lay in the arched cabinway and poured me a cup with scarcely any greeting.

I said, with the helpless appeal of patient to nurse, "Stay! Sit down. Tell me about the river."

"I cannot," she said, not looking at me.

"Because of what?"

For answer she held up the teapot and poked its spout toward the cabin door, as if to signal that her husband was just then terribly thirsty for tea. I asked her again to stay. She answered by turning away and starting back toward the door whose openness mocked me now. I called after her cautiously, trying to make my voice loud enough for her to hear but not loud enough to enter where she was about to, begging her, because loneliness and timelessness had, frankly, made a beggar of me, to come back when she could and talk with me. She made no response, but passed through the open door, and turned it into a closed door, while I became absurdly angry at the junk's master and hers. Oh, I hated him.

I began to be sorry for myself, and at first I used my surroundings as scapegoat for my mood. How had I let myself fall into such squalid circumstances? My bedroll was infested with crawling insects, which had come to succulent me from the hard-sinewed trackers, for their sleeping-mats lay all around my narrow share of deck. By night, when the procession of crawling things headed toward the new paradise I offered them, I was surrounded and kept awake by the tempests of the trackers' sleeping. In their soreness they snored and groaned, and they had active, twitching dreams, like dogs dozing by a hearth. Some had scabby crowns, some had sores on their legs. I itched constantly and imagined myself tainted and befouled, a piebald of ringworm and impetigo and white fungus. How I longed to lie in a porcelain tub in a white-tiled room, deep in the slickness of soap suds! Here instead I lay, flea-bitten, with beast-men for companions, tormented (most squalid thing of all) by want of the company of a girl who was herself, no doubt, lousy and unwashed, but who had such penetrating eyes, and such a tragic mouth, and such a mind for lyrics of the river, and such a memory for noble antiquities, in which men were brave, self-sacrificing, inexhaustibly generous, yet also cruel to death!

At last I was beginning, I suppose, to be more honest with myself. I think I had not realized in my conscious mind how deeply stirred I had been by this simple river woman in the days of my getting

well, and so I had not been able, either, to foretell the effect on me of seeing in her eyes that she had lost her heart hopelessly to the singer on the towline. Of course this was why I was so uneasy and bored and angry with my lot.

As soon as all this came out openly into my mind I felt for some reason much better and I fell asleep. . . .

A gentle hand on my shoulder woke me. I rolled over into the world. Su-ling was above me. I was very happy. I thought at first it was morning. I suppose only a few minutes had passed.

"What did you want?" Su-ling asked me; I dimly felt that she seemed hurried and brusque.

"I fell asleep," I said, stretching.

"You are as soft as a bean curd," she said, squatting on the deck under the archway near me. "What did you want?"

"I wanted to talk," I said. I sat up. My boredom and disgust had made me bold, and I said, "I wanted to know about you."

"I do what I have to do," she said.

"What kind of a life do you have?" I asked with a touch of scorn.

"I do what I have to do," Su-ling said again, and there was an insistent note of pride in her repeated words.

Abruptly I asked her to tell me about Old Pebble. She looked at me for a moment, as if wondering why I had asked, then quite cheerfully and openly she began to talk about the head tracker.

He was, she said, the strongest man she had ever seen. She said there had been times, when unexpected freshets had come, when he had hauled from sunup to sundown without stopping for so much as a cup of tea.

I asked what he worked so hard *for*.

"He works for work," she said. "He loves the work for its own sake. He loves everything he does for its own sake — everything he does on the river, that is. When he is in a city he is a poor man, he is like a crippled beggar."

Su-ling told me that Old Pebble knew boats better than most people knew people. He knew more about how junks were made than most junk-builders, and he was an exquisite wright himself and had helped to build and finish and found this craft we were

on. I had noticed the wonderful details of this junk — the hardwood tholepins on the stem beam, for instance, which acted as oarlocks for the great bow sweep, and which looked like parts of a piece of rare furniture, with queer tiger heads, grotesque as gargoyles, fastened to their tops; yes, Su-ling said, Old Pebble had carved them one time at Fu-ping.

Then Old Pebble had been with this junk since before it was launched?

Oh, yes, he had been in her husband's crew for many years. He was like an arm to the Old Big.

What sort of person was her husband?

"He thinks he is unlucky," she said, and she added that he was inwardly virtuous and kind, but that misfortune had made him sarcastic and suspicious. He had had a number of accidents on the river, and once he had suffered the total loss of a junk, and no one could tell him that this was the way of the Great River—that *every* captain had frequent accidents. He thought his misfortune was something special, something designed for him.

I had seen for myself that the owner was a tall, hawk-like, tendinous man, with not much insulation on his wires, not the sort for jollity — apparently a dyspeptic with a talent for inflicting misfortune on himself and misery on his dear ones, a man who would charge high rates for his virtue and make his kindness felt as a sort of punishment.

I could not help asking Su-ling why she had married this man.

"My parents thought it best," she said, and I saw the sweet serious tightness at the corner of her mouth.

So it was an arranged marriage! I thought of the Old Big's absolutely uniform behavior toward Su-ling — quiet, dogmatic, and curt; while she was always submissive to him, full of murmuring laughter and approval, and ready to act on his most wantonly frivolous wish. I had seen this as innocent, daughterly affection. Now I wondered what her inner feelings really were; I was more than ever curious about whatever it was she undoubtedly felt for the head tracker, and I went back to questioning her about him.

How could a poor man like Old Pebble who had not gone to school for a morning of his life know so many beautiful songs? It

seemed to me that in all our days on the river he had never sung the same song twice.

"The river is a school," Su-ling said. "The greatest scholars of Peking come to learn from the river."

Was there anything Old Pebble could not do?

"Very little," she said. "I'll tell you another thing: He can bargain. He does business for the Old Big." And she recounted how, bargaining in a boat-guild teahouse in Ichang for the cargo of this voyage, sitting at an old sleeve-polished table with his hand under a cloth clasping the hand of a seller and signaling his own offers with finger-squeezes, he had kept at the work so long, and had interrupted it so often with disgusted walkings-away and reluctant comings-back, that the merchant had at last broken into a sweat and become momentarily confused, and in that instant the cargo had been unexpectedly well bought.

This simple riverman could have been an engineer, I thought. If he had had a chance he could have learned all that I knew, and perhaps much more. But then would he have been the same man?

I asked Su-ling: Were all the Noise Suppressors on the river like this man? Could they all do almost anything?

"They are all different," she said. "Some learn from the river and some do not."

"And he has learned more than most?"

"More than most."

I do not know what stirred in me when I heard the pride in her voice as she said that. At any rate, I blurted out, "What do you feel for our Noise Suppressor?"

Again she lowered her eyes, and, "I have no right to any feelings," she demurely said.

Suddenly I was ashamed of myself for asking such a question, and I was struck by Su-ling's generosity in having talked to me as freely as she had of her circumstances. How far we had come in openness toward each other! I felt tender toward her; I wanted to show this surprising girl that I was not entirely foreign to her. But I thought of the head tracker and of what I had seen in her eyes the day before, after the towline had snagged underwater. I

was, I must say, in a melancholy state of mind. I remember the strange misty rain still floating in the air outside. "Ayah! . . . Ayah! . . ." Those sad cries!

At about this point (I remember that it was just before we reached the first of the rapids) the head tracker one noontime gave me reason to wish, and the wish soon became lively, that we could make a better pace.

Our progress was unusually slow, for there were strong winds against us. The owner told me, as I could have observed for myself, that though storms might veer with the compass in the sky overhead, only two kinds of wind ever blew on the surface of the water in the great Yangtze gorges; there were "up-wind" and "down-wind" and no other winds, and we were getting more than our share of the contrary one. A queer thing I did observe in certain deeps of the gorges was this: However strong the gale and however open the reach, no waves ever formed on the surface in those places. All the water there had an ugly slickness, laced with froth, and the wind slid over it as if it were molten metal.

The effect of these slick places was indescribably eerie; it was as strange as if one were to stand on a hill and feel wind on his face but not on his hands.

This smoothness of the water, together with the awesome cliffs of the gorges, gave certain passages of the channel on which we rode a supernatural and malevolent atmosphere, at least in my mind.

Yet the slickness was easy enough to explain; the Yangtze's waters, I could see, moved not only seawards but also up and around and down, stirred by rocks beneath, and none of the water was ever on the surface long enough to be moved by mere wind. It fought stone, not the plastic sky. It was sheer power, and should have lifted the heart of a young engineer — but instead the sight of it made me uneasy. I began to be exaggeratedly sensitive to the creaking, twisting, shrugging, and shivering of our big junk. There was a freakishness about the power of the Great River that I did not like. We would see sudden eddies of apparently still water right in midstream, with tons of fury all around. Here and there whirl-

pools traveled upstream! Su-ling told me one day of a shallow near Fengtu, where, one winter at low water, centuries ago, a famous warrior placed eight rows of cairns of small stones and pebbles along the river bed, to bring about some occult military result; they were called the Stones of the Strategy of Eight Ranks. "When the spring rains fall," Su-ling said with her eyes widened, "and when the snows on the mountains have melted, and the floods come down, big trees and rocks are carried down with the current a thousand miles. The water is high on the cliffs and the noise of the pebbles rolling on the bottom is like thunder. But for hundreds of years, when the waters subsided, the small piles of stones were still there. Then one year they went away."

It seemed one could not tell what this mountain-slicing river would do.

I had known in theory how savage the river could be. In its angriest year, since records had been kept, the river had risen no less than two hundred and seventy-five feet in one of the gorges in a few weeks of springtime. In an ordinary spring, it would rise easily half that much. . . . But only now, when Su-ling talked this way and I saw how very far the flood line was above the masthead of our junk, did the threat of the Great River's potential power come home to me.

I had been making friends with the cook. This was easy. I simply told him the truth — that his food was good.

In the very first days of the trip, I had understood my status on the junk from the nature of the food that had been given me. The cook served me no meat or chicken at all, and only certain vegetables, and certain measures of rice, and I saw that the grade of my diet was far below that of the owner and his wife, below that of the head tracker, the bow steersman, the cook himself, the drummer, and other specialists, and just above that of the common trackers. Perhaps this was one reason I had fallen sick; not, I mean, of undernourishment, but of dismay at seeing such a mediocre value put upon my person. I was an American, and I had received an advanced education in the great science of engineering — and I was ranked just a few leeks' worth above these paupered, ignorant men.

Gradually, however, the cook relented and morsel by morsel upgraded me. As I have said, he had made me various broths during my illness. He and the owner's wife seemed to reach some kind of understanding about me, for they nodded, winked, and laughed over me, as if I were some rare and comical taxidermist's specimen. The cook was by turns amused and horrified by my, to him, uncouth and barbarous habits. When he saw me one day deposit two blasts of nasal phlegm in a square of cloth and treasure these excreta in one of my pockets, he actually went to the owner and complained, requesting that I be put ashore at the next port on the river. But evidently his curiosity transcended his disgust. My diet improved, and I did not lie to the cook about the goodness of his food.

I had got in the habit of eating forward with the crew, because it had begun to embarrass me to be near the owner and Su-ling during meals. Her delicacy, her dexterity with her chopsticks, above all the motions of her lips filled me, I am frank to say, with carnal delight, and I could scarce keep my eyes off her face; with the result that the owner could scarce keep his off mine. These feasts of staring soon palled, and I sneaked forward to eat.

One noon I was sharing a meal with the head tracker, the rope handler, and a shift of trackers, and I believe the cook himself had paused to sweep a bowlful of rice into his mouth on brisk chopstick ends. Mostly the cook's eating consisted of tasting; only rice went down in bolts. The eaters, except for me, were squatting on their hams, their heels hard on the deck; I had found that my feet fell asleep in that position so popular in China, so I sat cross-legged leaning back against a big coil of bamboo rope. We were eating fried fish. We were a calm circle; the cook had mildly joked about the impoliteness of the *yang-ḳuei-tzŭ,* the foreign devil, me, who had not the common courtesy to compliment his hosts by an occasional graceful slurp or any other slight audible signal of relish, for he ate, the cook said, as silently as a turtle.

To this I replied that in my country only pigs' food was greeted with pigs' noises.

"What," asked the rope handler, a dull and serious-minded boy

who took everything I said as an attack on China, "is wrong with pigs?"

With a startling suddenness, the head tracker emitted an angry cry, leapt to his feet, charged across perhaps ten feet of deck, and with purple face flew at the throat of one of the trackers. I saw the victim of this amazing assault, a farm boy fresh-shipped on the river, who had been the butt of much foredeck raillery because of his greenness and clumsiness aboard, but who was willing and hard-working — I saw him look up in a moment of terror at his on-hurtling assailant, and he tried to let free a shout, but the flying noose of Old Pebble's hands hit his Adam's apple just then, and only a sickening gurgle came out. The head tracker was shrieking curses. The boy's head flew back and hit the deck. The other men went on eating with a dreadful kind of caution, like that of by-standers in the Occident at an unspeakable accident, who are so afraid of being dragged into court as witnesses that they turn their eyes from the event with frozen equanimity. I thought the head tracker was having a mad fit of some kind. I wanted to try to stop the terrible thrashing but was somehow held back by the iron hand of the others' indifference — and also possibly by a recollection of how strong Su-ling had said the head tracker was.

At last Old Pebble let up. The boy lay on the deck barely conscious, moaning and rolling his eyes.

The head tracker stood up. The bow steersman, in a quiet conversational voice, as if nothing more serious had happened than the upsetting of a bowl of rice, asked the panting head tracker, "What did the boy do, Old Pebble?"

"Didn't you see him?" the head tracker said, raging. "He turned his fish over!"

The rope handler and two or three of the trackers clapped down their bowls and stood up.

"Bastard!"

"Turtle!"

"Idiot!"

The men were in great earnest, and they showed considerable fear. One of the trackers spat on the boy.

I saw that the owner and Su-ling had come forward.

"He took it and lifted it up and turned it over," the head tracker cried, his frenzy still at a high pitch, acting out as he shouted the motions of turning over a pan fish in a bowl with a pair of chopsticks.

There were murmuring and agitation among all the trackers.

"It's done now," the owner said in a calm voice.

"It's done, but what's done!" the head tracker screamed in fury, as if the owner had now aligned himself with the boy and deserved to have *his* throat squeezed.

"There is no way," the owner sadly said.

"There is no way! There is no way!" the cook, joining the head tracker's side, cried in mockery. "Look what's done! Look what the bastard has done!"

"The boy is a farmer," the owner said. "He did not know what he was doing."

"Now tell me," the cook sarcastically suggested, "that the boy did not know that the river is rising!"

The owner's eyes turned as if involuntarily toward the riverbank. Then he looked back squarely at the cook and said, as if accepting a dare, "I tell you that the boy did not know the river is rising."

"Then the boy has eggs instead of eyes in his head," the head tracker retorted.

"The Great River rises every year," the owner said with a terrible sadness, as if this well-known disastrous fact would calm the men. "Call in the other shift to eat," he said, to put an end to the undignified debate.

It did not escape me, during these exchanges over the river's rise, that I had been wrong and blind — that these men, who had seemed so unfeeling, so indifferent, in the face of the river's awesome terrains and hinted terrors, were, after all, responsive to those things; that they were, moreover, conscious of their progress up the river, and anxious to go a little faster, for they obviously feared the rise of the waters and what might happen to them if they did not reach Wanhsien before the real freshets of spring.

I confess I reflected their anxiety; I had only to look at the flood line far overhead to feel a chill.

Still I was puzzled over the head tracker's violent reaction to

the overturning of the fish, and later I asked Su-ling to explain it to me.

Pale, clearly distressed herself, she answered me in a low voice, "Capsize fish — capsize boat."

I laughed, and she looked at me in amazement and fear. It was, then, just another stupid superstition of the river. Oh, I laughed! What nonsense! It did not require a degree from a technological institute to tell that there could be no possible physical connection, no gyroscopic relationship, between the poise of the spine and ribs of a tiny pan fish and that of an eighty-ton junk. What utter nonsense! . . .

Yet how many times, as we advanced farther up the river, and as the waters rose and rose and rose, did I think of that upset fish, and of the rabid head tracker, and of the gurgling offensive boy, and of the disconcerting wisdom of some "backward" Chinese, and of fate and luck, and of the absurdity of many of my own long-cherished hopes? Yes, how often — long before we reached Wind-Box Gorge?

PART TWO The Rapids

For several miles, as we approached the first of the bad rapids, at Hsintan, I was able to hear the dull roar of the water ahead, and I watched the owner become progressively keyed up; he walked the decks restlessly, his demeanor one of tight-stretched calm.

Many times the Old Big consulted the head tracker, as to which bank would be safer for the ascent at this time of year and at this level of water. He decided finally to use the north bank, on our right as we ascended. Soon afterward he disappeared in his cabin, where I heard him coughing often.

Out on the conning deck, that afternoon, Su-ling schooled me in more myths of the Great River, and in passing, to elaborate some point she was making about danger, she mentioned in her quiet murmur the time when her husband had lost his junk; it had been before she had married him, she said.

Her last sentence was scarce completed when the owner came bursting out of the cabin, buttoning a cotton gown in a hurry, offering to tell me about the accident.

So quietly had Su-ling been speaking that I concluded the Old Big must audit her instruction of me with an ear hard applied to a crack in the cabin door.

The owner squatted in the Chinese way and began. It had been, he said, at Kungling Rapids, just below Ox-Liver Horse-Lungs Gorge, a passage that is dangerous only at extreme low water. The whole disaster was the fault of a local rapids pilot. The Old Big spat over the rail, and a grimace seized his face, as if he were over-exerting himself by hauling on a halyard or shoving on a capstan bar; he looked as if the mere thought of a river pilot made every agonized muscle in his body go tense.

"All the rapids pilots are turtles and turtle dung," he said. "Your rapids pilot cannot do things the safe way; he has to find a new and more dangerous course each time he goes through. He wants to show the world something. The rapids are like opium for him: the more he takes, the more he needs. He dreams he is a discoverer, and he looks for new ways, and it is not *his* junk that hits the rock. Ayah, he is a turtle."

"But how," I asked, "could there be a 'new way' when Su-ling tells me that junks have hardly changed since the time of Huang-ti, and the river has changed so little?"

"There is a new way every forty years," the Old Big bitterly said. "It is an old way but it is called new. River pilots wait only for their grandfathers, who know better, to die before they claim they have found a new way."

"There are many rocks in the river," Su-ling said, "so there are many ways."

"Maybe it is worth finding a new way," I said, thinking of my dam.

"Yes, it is worth it if the junk belongs to someone else," the owner said.

In Kungling race, the owner said, the classical descending channel for junks is between Big Rock and the reef called Hsitang and, farther down, between the three rocks called the Pearls and the left shore. But here was a rapids pilot — the Old Big spat again — who thought he would find a way between Head Pearl and Second Pearl; he would make some other man's junk dance among the whirlpools and he would be the man to have found a new way.

The pilot, it seems, had not told the Old Big beforehand that he intended to shoot the flume between the Pearls, and only after the junk had passed the foot of Big Rock, and was making fierce speed, with the trackers all on deck rowing and stamping rhythmically on the planks at a frantic rate to keep steerageway — only then did the pilot indicate by the manipulation of his fingers that the great bow sweep and stern rudder should drive the craft *away* from the shore; and the owner, standing by the mast, had, he said, believed the pilot had simply made a mistake, and he had rushed forward shouting to those manning the bow sweep to swing it back and fetch the junk into its normal course.

Not knowing whom to obey, the bow sweepers had pushed and pulled against each other, so that the indecisive junk swung into a whirlpool and broached broadside to the current and threw itself on Head Pearl and broke its back.

The junk was lost, and its cargo; twenty-three men drowned; the red lifeboats of the guild below the rapids picked only the pilot out of the water; the owner kept afloat for three long li and perched then on a rock, to be saved at dusk.

"Then it was really your fault," I had the temerity to say to the owner, "for changing the pilot's order."

"Why look for a new way when you know the old way has usually been safe?" he asked, and he was disgusted with me and went back into his cabin.

A few minutes later he thrust his head out of the cabin, and the veins stood out on his forehead, and he looked wild and furious.

"You!" he said, jerking his face at me. "Listen. We can take our boat through any of the rapids on the river without a rapids pilot. We are going to take our boat through Hsintan without a pilot. Old Pebble knows more than ten river pilots. He'll take us through. You will see."

"You've been saying that at each of the rapids for years," Su-ling very softly rebuked him.

The owner ignored his wife and almost spat at me, "You will see."

All the rest of that day the owner remained in his cabin. We moored late in the evening on the upper edge of a rocky beach a few hundred yards below the last of the three rapids of Hsintan, which lay in a wide, open valley between gorges. On that spit we spent a restless night. Downgoing junkmen, having run the rapids, their tension released, celebrated late and noisily in the temporary mat sheds of wine-venders above our beach; trying to sleep, I heard their occasional shouts, as well as the thin whine of a Chinese two-stringed fiddle. To my ears, which were used to the orderly mathematics of Bach, Mozart, and Beethoven, this Chinese music sounded like complaints against the moon by a maddened tomcat. Nearby, in the after cabin, I heard a constant nervous cough from the owner. And underlying all, seeming almost to make the stony beach beneath us vibrate, was the rumble of the river in its own restless bed.

EARLY in the morning the head tracker and the cook propitiated the river-guarding god.

It was not long after dawn, and the day's hard work had not begun. The cook, having distributed bowls of rice to the trackers and the specialists, hurried ashore and half-ran with comical waddling steps toward the mat sheds at the top of the spit. Remembering his errand at Ichang, I resigned myself to a wasted day — or rather, tried to contrive good uses for an idle day, for my attitude toward time had somewhat loosened on the river, especially since my watch had stopped. But in a very few minutes the cook reappeared, carrying a flame-red rooster and grinning like a bridegroom.

Everything seemed to be understood. As soon as the cook came aboard with the proud red jealous-eyed bird under his arm, the trackers disposed themselves on their haunches here and there, and conversation, though it did not cease, became subdued.

The head tracker and the cook walked with stilted, formal pace, like that of dancers, to the very bow. The head tracker seemed priest, the cook his acolyte. Old Pebble, who was unusually heavy-bearded for a Chinese, had not shaved since the start of our journey, and his whole gay head seemed to bristle with a quarter-inch stubble, all over his chin and cheeks and shorn crown. The two men moved with grotesque stateliness, each gesture a studied caricature of a gesture, their wrists twisting unnaturally, their

knees slightly bent as if they were stalking something elusive. All the time they grinned at each other like a pair of practical jokers preparing a malicious hoax. The head tracker stamped his foot and clicked his tongue, to show that even ritual has rhythm. The owner and Su-ling came out of their cabin and stood at the after end of the deckhouse arch, watching. The nearby rapids roared.

Suddenly, with a magician's flourish, the cook drew from the cotton girth that held up his trousers a short knife and handed it to the head tracker, who braced himself to take it as if it were some mighty Emperor's many-battled sword, and then giggled at his own buffoonery.

This was strange worship! The priests were laughing at the rite and at themselves; yet surely it was devoutly intended, for all were evidently in awe of the rapids and would understandably want any supernatural aid they could wangle for the ascent. Stranger yet was the god, about whom Su-ling had told me one day downriver. The river-guarding god, Chien-chiang Wang Te, was not, it seemed, a being imagined by river folk in mystery, fear, and yearning, but was in fact the apotheosis of a human rascal, the deification of a twelfth-century pirate of the Great River whose only claim to divinity, Su-ling had told me, was unending success; he could not fail in his mischievous undertakings — until, at last, meeting defeat in very old age, he plunged into the waters of Tungting Lake and drowned himself. So perhaps these roguish priests were suitable after all; and perhaps, it occurred to me, this wanton traffic on the wild rapids and in the profound gorges of the Great River *was* a kind of mischief, and perhaps it was fitting to ask success in it from a master knave.

The cook, swiftly passing his hand over the comb and hackle of the cock, fixed his broad right thumb onto the end of the bird's beak and doubled back the head until it nested on the back-feathers between the wings.

The head tracker stepped forward and, making an exaggerated face of care, slit the crimson throat.

The cook whirled and bent and aimed the pulsating spurts of blood, darker than the bird, at the top of the beam across the junk's swim-headed bow, till the arching crimson issue diminished and became a dribble and the red bundle held in the cook's firm grip let up its spasmodic struggle against the inevitable.

Then, while the cook still held the body, the head tracker tugged at a tail feather as if it were a bamboo hawser with a junk at the far end of it, and in a thin, barely audible whine hummed a snatch from a tracking song, till the feather gave way; he pasted it into the blood on the stem beam. He took others and did the same, until the whole beam was gay with two reds, of death and good luck.

The cook retired to his open-air galley and with astonishing dexterity plucked and gutted the fowl and threw it into an already

boiling pot, and when the meat was done he brought helpings in a bowl and offered them to the owner, who declined, and to Su-ling, who with the same decisiveness turned the offer down, and even to me, and I was not so stupid as to accept, for I could see that some formula was being worked out. So the cook and the head tracker sat down then alone to their tender portions of graft, and washing down the sweet flesh with rice brandy at what must have been barely seven o'clock in the morning, they guffawed and got drunk over a rollicking hearty breakfast.

Afterwards Su-ling came to me and said that the Old Big had decided to disembark the entire cargo of the junk and have it portaged around the rapids, and that he had ordered her to walk around and to take the foreigner, me, with her.

I was glad to hear this. I would have the pleasure of Su-ling's company all day, and I would be relieved of playing a rôle in the ascent, about which, I confess, I had been none too easy myself. I supposed that the owner's sending me ashore was more to get rid of a possible source of bad luck than to bestow security on a person of some worth.

The owner let Old Pebble take charge of everything. The head tracker was in high spirits after his breakfast, and he made a game of the unloading. All the men shouted and laughed as they worked. Old Pebble's enjoyment of the process was boundless. I was fascinated by his negotiation to hire fifty porters, each of whom, I gathered, was to get four coppers, the equivalent then of two American pennies, to carry load enough for a sturdy quadruped some three and a half rough miles around the rapids. Old Pebble stood in front of a crowd of ragbag men and boys from the village and called them out one by one. He felt obliged to discuss the qualifications of each porter, to discover each man's strength and delicacy of pace, as if the Old Big's junk nested a cargo of fine-wrought jade, and not baled cotton, to be carried up the path around danger.

From time to time the owner intervened in the morning's work, and he outdid himself with the great loudness of his voice and the darting of his eyes; he was the perfect spokesman for the anger

that is the child of anxiety. He seemed dreadfully afraid of the rapids. During the unloading he danced from rock to rock like a threatened sea lion, on each perch cocking his head, gazing at the scattering of his once-compact wealth over a quarter-mile of riverbank, and then, in a quick and terror-stricken glance, forcing himself to examine the rapids ahead. He cursed his men and blasphemed against the river-guarding god. He blamed the porters for their delays and delayed them still further by the length of his sermons on their sloth. He counted the bales of his cargo over and over, and often cried out in mid-count that he had lost track of his numbers.

It was late in the morning before we were ready to leave, and off we set then in single file up a rocky path. To my distress I discovered that the owner had delegated the cook to walk along with our party and look out for the goods, including Su-ling. I should have foreseen that the cautious Old Big would take out an insurance policy, in the person of the rascally cook, to warrant his most precious chattel.

We walked at the head of the procession of overladen, singing, groaning porters up a series of terraces, climbing all the while, around a wide bay formed by a bend in the river. As we climbed away from the river on a path that wound among rocks and gorse-like shrubs, the sun, which had been behind a morning overcast, came flashing out, and the forenoon seemed suddenly a holiday for me.

Above the flood line the path moved through cultivated terraces lined with dusty cypresses, poplars, and peach trees proud with blossoms; once in a while I glanced at the river, which seemed, the farther we moved away from it and above it, increasingly benign and pure, the froth of its faraway anger sparkling under the sun like a billion of the suds of the West I missed so much in those days.

Still, though, the rapids roared.

I heard Su-ling and the cook talking and laughing, and at last she announced that they would take me to what she called the Scholar's Restaurant — an establishment, she explained, that was run by the grandson of a man who had brought acclaim to the

whole province by having passed the imperial examinations in early years and had gone all the way to Peking to become a court scholar; then he had come home and had been a great official — that is to say, a man absolutely without honor. His descendants had honor and no cash; they ran an eating place. I would get a surprise there, she told me.

We walked through the hanging village of Hsintan, high on a bluff above the rapids, through shop-lined alleys that were so precipitous that they were mostly paved with stone stairs. The cook said the whole village had been built from the wreckage of junks that had come to grief in the rapids. A large crowd of gay, scabrous children pressed along beside and behind us, cheering my nose.

The restaurant was an odd heap of bamboo poles, split-bamboo matting, cypress planks, straw-reinforced clay, and a few bricks, and it stood out from the cliff on long bamboo stilts.

The proprietor, who with folded hands and nodding head maintained the manners of a scholar in his family's tradition, but who had a very dull eye, greeted Su-ling, the cook, and me at the door with a low bow, as if we were ambassadors from a distant kingdom.

He led us first through a large tearoom near the street in which were seated the most prosperous-looking and complacent-seeming collection of men I had seen on the river. They were rapids pilots, Su-ling told me. They wore fine long gowns and black silk skullcaps, and they tucked their hands into their voluminous sleeves, and they seemed to be taciturn, stiff-necked men.

The owner took us to a small private room on the river side, containing nothing but a round table and half a dozen chairs.

The view from the glassless windows was another of the astounding, shock-like spectacles the Great River grants a stranger at every new turning. Off to the left were the ghastly riven mountains at the head of Ox-Liver Horse-Lungs Gorge, and at the right the vast, gloomy vee of the Gorge of the Military Code and Precious Blade; and between these amazing extremes, before us, as in a great bright amphitheater of a round valley, was the center of drama, the river in a frenzy.

We were looking down on the uppermost of the three rapids of Hsintan. This was made by a huge fan-shaped moraine of rocks lying athwart the river and forming, at that season of the year, a kind of low dam, in which there were several gapways, like sluices, and through these openings the water poured, that day, with terrible haste.

Waiting only for me to pay formal compliments to this staggering outlook, the cook excused himself, to return, he said, to the pack of walking rags in the street, and to go forward with them to the loading rock near the river gauge by the still water above the race.

These rapids, said Su-ling, standing at the window, had mainly been formed by a landslide in the second year of the reign of the Emperor Chia Ching of the Ming dynasty. Having been made so recently — only about three centuries ago — they were known, she said, as the New Rapids.

As we watched, three down-bound junks ran the rapids, and on the foredeck of each a river pilot stood like a black enormous bird on wide-planted feet, with arms raised and hands outspread, his huge sleeves and long gown flapping wildly in the turbulent air, but his head steady on his ramrod neck, transmitting signals to the frantic oarsmen by the lift of a finger on one hand, the folding of two fingers on the other hand, and so by sure economical movements of tiny sinews controlling the huge, awkward vessels in the fearfully entangling waters. No wonder they were such dominant, confident men as we had seen in the tearoom!

When I saw the first of them on deck there, I could not help thinking of our Old Big's expressions of contempt for all pilots on the Great River, and of his tale of his wreck, and of his boast that he would climb Hsintan without a pilot, with Old Pebble in charge.

But, Su-ling said, why had I not seen the surprising thing in this room in the Scholar's eating place?

I turned toward the girl to see what she meant, and she swept a leaf-like hand pointing at the walls. I looked round and saw that the room was entirely papered with pages from English-

language textbooks, mostly of arithmetic and rhetoric. I came to life and laughed.

Su-ling told me that the present proprietor's father, aspiring to follow in *his* father's footsteps as a scholar, dreaming perhaps of striding in the robes of a great diplomat in foreign palaces, had brought these books, and others in Chinese whose pages now adorned the walls of other rooms of the house, but had found his capacities less elevated than his ambitions, had given up his studies, had set up this eating place for junk owners and river pilots, and had at last put the pages of his books to good use as wallpaper, to keep the wind from whistling through the walls of matting and uneven boards.

I began to move around sampling the pages and soon I saw that the texts had been written, not by Englishmen, but by high-minded Chinese authors, whose notions of style were grand and oddly turned. There were quaint problems in mathematics involving calculations on the abacus; there were some very strange models of English grammar.

"Why do you smile?" Su-ling asked.

"Come here and let me read you this," I said, for I had found an area of the wall that was taken up with models of correspondence, and I wanted to share my amusement with her. The text ran like this:

No. 34

Dear sir:

Since last night it has been snowing, on which the ground is as if it were changed into a silver world and the dry leaves are as if they were decorated with white flowers.

It is one's conclusion that after snow falling the scenery of the river brightens with much more vividness.

I think it is not very prudent that we confine by the stove in spite of such a view. So I intend to get in a boat on the dangerous river for the purpose of taking a fine sight.

Though with your ability you can scarcely need my advice, yet allow me the freedom to express the strong hope that you will join me. It hurts me to consider of your staying indoors, for I regret to see you

continue in those bad habits of indifference to beautiful views which may shorten your life.

Please write to me very fast,
Your devoted servant,

Su-ling laughed, with the sweet murmuring indulgent laughter with which I had so often heard her bless the owner of the junk, as I translated. I was very much aware that she was standing close beside me as I followed the words of the letter with an index finger, and this awareness contributed, I am sure, to the awkwardness of my translation, at which, I now realize, she was laughing, rather than at the sentiments of the letter, which were *my* source of amusement.

We laughed together. I was animated now, trying very hard to be agreeable. We laughed, and when I had finished my absurd rendering, our eyes met, and hers sparkled, and I guess mine must have, too, and just then a man arrived with some handleless cups and a teapot. We sat down and were gay and easy.

Thus a translation of a translation brought us together, but I can see now that we were still very far apart, farther apart indeed than languages, even though we had laughed together, for our laughter was cruel, as laughter so often is. I was laughing at the awkwardness of a Chinese mind, the translator's; Su-ling at the awkwardness of a Western mind, mine. And now that I think back, I realize that the real gap between us lay in the fact that I, who was so proud of coming from the swift-winged world of science, was laughing at an old world where it was possible seriously to believe that men die young of the bad habit of failing to go out on a dangerous river to gaze at the earth when it turns overnight into silver.

Later we stood again at the window, and we saw our junk appear next to the bank off to the left, being tracked into the approach to the lowest rapid.

Su-ling drew in her breath with surprise when she looked at the junk.

"He is going to do it," she said. "He will be in trouble with the guild."

Then I saw Old Pebble. He stood on the foredeck in a shiny black gown that had come from long repose in some boat-locker and that was much too big for him, with its sleeves folded back, showing a lining of bright blue silk, and he wore a black skullcap, and he looked like a ridiculous clown. His arms were raised. He stood motionless, perfectly poised, pretending to be a pilot. We could not see his face, but his bearing was one of contempt for the millions of hurly-burly tons of water before him. With the oversize gown flapping in the strong up-wind, even this contempt seemed, like so many of Old Pebble's moods, to be exaggerated, almost satirized.

Somehow word spread of our owner's audacity, or madness, and before long the big tearoom on the street side of the Scholar's Restaurant emptied itself, and the river-guild office across the street was vacated, and all the pilots gathered in their black gowns and black skullcaps on the steep slope between the river and the tracking bund of the uppermost, and most hazardous, of the three rapids of Hsintan, and they stood there chattering like a flock of clerics, evidently hoping for disaster and a chance to laugh at a fool of a junk owner and a head tracker with ideas above his station.

Old Pebble stood on the deck with his neck stiffened in the manner of a river-guild pilot, his arms raised and motionless, his form utterly rigid but for the wide sleeves of his gown beating like the wings of an eagle.

AT THAT season of the year the second and third rapids of Hsintan were severe but not dangerous, and within an hour our junk, inching along close to the shore, had reached the stretch of whirling eddies above the middle race. Su-ling and I left the restaurant and went, along with quite a number of the villagers, who had apparently heard about the headstrong owner ascending without a pilot, out to the bank beside the tracking bund near where the pilots had already gathered to watch the ascent of the bad uppermost rapids.

The cook, taking the head tracker's place ashore, was supervising the laying out of the tracking lines. At the spit below the rapids early in the morning, the owner had made arrangements with the rapids-heaving concessionaire for three hundred local trackers to be taken onto the towlines at the Head Rapid, in addition to the junk's own forty-odd. This gang was now gathering.

Long lines were laid out fanwise on the wide uphill slope of the tracking bund, and, as the cook, who was perhaps still mildly drunk from his sacrificial breakfast, stamped and shouted and laughed, running here and there on his fat short legs giving instructions with such good humor that it seemed almost a travesty of pleasantness, the trackers, an even more pathetic collection of tatterdemalions than our porters of the morning, began to attach themselves resignedly to the lines. They had such sad faces!

There I observed closely for the first time the mechanism of the trackers' halters. I particularly remember this because I had occasion to think again of the fallible device of these harnesses in Wind-Box Gorge. This piece of gear consisted of a looped strap of white cotton cloth, which the tracker passed over one shoulder and across his body, and which was joined at both ends to a short length of square sennit, which in turn ran through a big stubby button of bone or wood and ended beyond in a wall knot. Each tracker owned his own harness and over his filthy rags it was his only badge of pride and honor; some of the most hope-starved beggars of all, I saw, kept their harnesses in handsome condition, with clean white straps, and with beautiful double crowns on the wall knots holding the buttons, and the buttons delicately carved. The tracker would take a half-hitch with his sennit around the bamboo towline, and when there was strain on the sennit it bore against the button and held a firm grip on the towline, but directly tension relaxed it loosened — a safety device whereby the tracker could release himself in most but, as I was in sadness to see, not all emergencies.

A black-clad pilot accosted our cook close to where Su-ling and I stood.

"What does your Noise Suppressor think he is?" the pilot contemptuously asked.

"He is an old good," our cook loyally said.

"He is an old wad of turtle dung," the pilot said.

"He has sharp eyes," the cook said, pushing forward and puffing out his chest like an urchin offering to fight. "He has good eyes and he intends to find a new way through Head Rapid that you turtles have never found."

Now I took this to be a double-edged sarcasm, directed, in the cook's mind, as I read it, against both the pilot, who could see only one side of the matter, and against the owner, who hated so bitterly the quest for a "new way."

"Ha!" the pilot cried. "He'll find a new way for a rock to make love to a boat."

"And the children of this love will be more pilots for the New Rapids — with rock heads and cypress bottoms."

"What is your owner's name?"

"He is old Yang from Wanhsien."

"I'll remember not to ship on his boat — I mean the new one he'll have to get after his Noise Suppressor wrecks this one."

Su-ling stepped forward into the conversation, saying in a positive tone, "The boat will not be wrecked. Our Noise Suppressor knows more than ten pilots."

"He knows less than one turtle," the pilot said, turning away.

Su-ling and the cook looked at each other and shrugged.

THE ROCKS between the sluices of the uppermost rapid were mostly covered. It was quite clear that the only way to ascend Head Rapid would be to climb one of the races through these gaps. There would be three parts to the task of getting through a sluice: first and worst, the junk would have to approach it through the madly choppy area where the waters from the various sluices met and mixed and fought; then it would have to go up a long, wedge-shaped tongue of swift clear slick water rushing through the gap; and at last it would have to heave over the round head of the sudden fall above this tongue and then be towed out into the apparently mill-pond stillness above the rapids. And all this, it was evident, was further complicated by the fact that there was no sluice close against the riverbank on our side, so that to get into

one the junk would have to shear out on its towline into the stream; furthermore, it looked to me as if the second sluice, a good sixty or seventy feet from shore, was much wider and more negotiable than the first. Beyond the second sluice there was an outcropping of dry rocks.

The lines were ready; Old Pebble waved up from the junk. The head tracker ordered the hawsers cast off that had held the vessel against the bank. We saw him take his outspread stance then, and up went his neck like a spar, till he seemed proud and ready.

"The Old Big looks sick," Su-ling said. We could see the owner standing by the mast.

"You can't even see his face," I said.

"He's afraid," she said.

I saw a motion of Old Pebble's left hand, and fifteen men on the bow sweep heaved it hard over. The big hull sluggishly nosed away from the bank, and the main towing hawser slowly lifted as it took strain from the three-hundred-odd trackers to its point of lodgment halfway up the mast.

All at once the junk was in the raging waters of the approach, shearing out swiftly from shore. It heaved and swayed and seemed beyond being steered. Above the buzzing of the pilots around us, above the rush of the rapids, we heard the dismal whining chant of the bow sweepers as they fought their great oar back toward the bank, leading the huge hull that way, too.

I heard a scream. Our cook was running down the tracking bund, shrieking like a crazy man, "No! No good! No good! The second gate! Go for the second!"

The pilots all laughed.

The junk was indeed tending toward the first of the sluices, an inhospitable little twisted tongue of water perhaps thirty feet from shore. On deck Old Pebble stood as if paralyzed, his arms upraised, doing nothing. "He's mixed up," Su-ling said in a miserable voice. He did look as if he were surprised by the circumstances in which he found himself.

"The second gate! The second gate!" the cook screamed again and again.

At the time I was quite certain that the head tracker could not

hear the cook's hysterical shouts from such a distance, for the junk was right in the midst of the worst rushing of all, and Old Pebble stood stock still and seemed to be waiting for someone else to take charge.

All at once the junk began to swing broadside to the current, and the whole craft heeled sharply to starboard, the mast swinging slowly over like a fainting man.

"Finished!" Su-ling cried. "Finished! Finished!"

The towline whipped as the mast leaned over, and the three hundred and fifty men on the bank staggered and were pulled back down the bund several steps, so that their unison pace was broken.

The pilots, who had been laughing a moment before, were now silent or softly groaned, for each could imagine himself on that tilting foredeck. Several of them cried sharply, "Ayah!" — the trackers' word, which on the pilots' lips was a shout of despair and pity.

Slowly the junk righted itself, for the towline had gone as taut as a piano string; all the trackers were leaning forward and pawing at the earth as if their own lives were at stake.

As the deck leveled itself, Old Pebble still stood there with an ashen face, with his arms still stretched over his head, his fists clenched, doing nothing.

Again the nose of the junk began to turn, and it was clear that this time the boat would broach to, and I felt sure that it would capsize.

Just then Old Pebble dropped his arms and clutched at his chest and side, and I thought for a moment he was having some kind of heart attack. But I saw that he was tearing at his great encumbering silk gown of dignity, and in a moment he had it off, and all pretense was off him, and his face had lost its bewildered look, and he ran like a common crewman for a long lizard — a bamboo pole with a hook on it.

As the junk began to heel over very slowly, Old Pebble staggered across the heaving deck, waving the lizard against the sky. He reached up and caught the towline with the hook and pulled it downwards.

He shouted something to the dozen men on the great bow

sweep. They pushed down on the treetrunk that served for a handle for the huge oar, and two of them looped over it two bights of bamboo hawser which lashed it amidships with its blade out of water.

Then the men reeled like twelve drunkards to Old Pebble's side on the rearing deck and with him pulled down on the towline, and with shouts they forced it downwards until it was securely boused in a notch under the stem beam on the starboard side.

By this time the cook, seeing what Old Pebble was doing, had started running up the bund again, and with shrieks that were the best he could do for song, he gave the trackers a rhythm for their steps.

The junk righted itself. The biased leverage of the towline's new purchase pulled it around. It nosed upstream and slowly inched outward from the shore. When the craft was at the tip of the tongue of the second sluice, Old Pebble and the bow sweepers cast off the boused line.

I glanced up at the flock of pilots. They were pale, and there was no longer a trace of derision on their faces, for they had seen an unexpected flash of courage and seamanship and command do something they could not have done in a thousand years with stately wags of their long-nailed fingers.

THOUGH the junk was now apparently safe, for it breasted the smooth, swift water of the second sluice and was no longer being thrown from side to side, the heaviest work still remained to be done. I turned to watch the trackers, for theirs was now the heavy work of making many tons of cypress go uphill on a fiercely resisting roadway of water. It was a moving sight — horribly depressing, to see more than three hundred human beings reduced to the level of work animals, blindfolded asses and oxen; yet thrilling, too, to see the irresistible force of their co-operation, for the three hundred and fifty cloth shoes of their each step up the slope were planted in the same moment, and the sad trackers' cries, "Ayah! . . . Ayah! . . . ," were sung in a great unison choir of agony and joy, and the junk did move.

It moved, however, more and more slowly, as the last and hardest

test of the trackers' labor began — heaving the junk over the head of the rapid, over the round, swift crest of the sluice. The bow of the junk seemed to dig into the water there. The rope grew taut. The great crowd of towing men hung for a long time unable to move.

I saw the cook look down toward the junk, obviously at a loss what to do.

Then suddenly from midstream, from the very center of danger, came a lovely, clear, high-pitched line of song.

It was Old Pebble. I looked out and saw him standing on the deck, himself leaning as if to pull, hurling a beautiful song at the crowd on the bank.

On the proper beat the many trackers gave out a kind of growl and moved their feet forward a few inches, and the bow of the junk dug deeper into the head of the sluice. They took a second, firmer step. And a third, and a fourth.

I had never heard Old Pebble sing such a haunting melody. I saw that he was in a kind of ecstasy. His face shone in a grimace of hard work and happiness. I remembered my doubts about his credo of "simplicity," which he had recited to me in our first evening on the river, and I remembered my distress that such a sturdy young man did not avow personal goals of wealth, love, honor, and fame. Now I saw from his face that *this* was his life's goal: this instant of work, this moment's line of song, this accord with his poor fellow men, this brief spurt of useful loyalty to the cranky, skinny, half-mad owner of the junk on which he had shipped, and above all this fleeting triumph over the Great River.

At last the junk raised its head, shivered, and shot suddenly forward into the still water of the pond above the rapids.

When it was over, and the junk was pulled up to the loading platform, Old Pebble was streaming sweat, but he looked very happy.

I walked down to the river's edge to see what he would say. He jumped ashore and bent down to the river and scooped up double handfuls of the brown water and washed his face, sloshing and snorting like a small boy. I moved near him. He looked up. All he said was, "Ayah, this river is a turtle."

AFTERWARDS Su-ling and I returned to the Scholar's Restaurant.

The cook told us he would bring the owner and the head tracker up there as soon as the junk was moored; there would not be time for reloading in the remainder of that day.

When first we sat down again, in the room overlooking the rapids, I wanted to talk about what we had just seen, and I had a feeling that Su-ling wanted to talk about it, too, but instead she began babbling about the unfortunate *fêng-shui,* or "wind-water," of the New Rapids. This was part of a pseudo-science of geomancy, which holds that the exposure of a house or a town to certain fluxes and counter-fluxes of air and moisture, above and below ground, controls the fortunes of the place, and of the people who live in it, or who pass through it, and that only the judicious placing of walls, trees, ditches, or pagodas can favorably alter them.

Su-ling said she agreed with those who felt that the uppermost of the three pagodas on the left bank at Hsintan was badly placed and did not sufficiently deflect the evil emanations from the Gorge of the Military Code and Precious Blade above the rapids. Many a junk had been wrecked because of the failure of that pagoda to correct the *fêng-shui* of the valley, she gravely said.

I looked at the girl mouthing this rubbish and became impatient. "Listen!" I said. "With twenty thousand dollars I could change things here so that no junk need ever be wrecked again — so that there would never be need for pilots."

The girl did not ask me how I could do this. She asked me with wide eyes where I could ever get so much money.

I pointed out to her the widest sluice in the Head Rapid, close to the opposite bank of the river, and the next widest, which was adjacent and farther out in the stream. It would be easy, I told Su-ling, for divers to set charges and blast out the nest of rocks between these two gaps with dynamite (for which I knew no Chinese word but called it "big strength powder") and make a broad, deep channel through which the water of the Great River would hurry but in which there would be no danger.

Now Su-ling looked at me with an expression of alarm, as if *I*

were the victim of mad superstition. *Fêng-shui* and dynamite: I suppose they *were* irreconcilable.

"You want to change the river?" Su-ling said.

"If it makes things easier for men — why not?"

"Nothing can change the Great River!"

I scoffed at Su-ling. "It would have been much easier for Old Pebble today if the rapids had been opened up."

"Let me warn you," she said. "Never speak to Old Pebble about such changes. Never boast to *him* that you can do such things to the Great River."

"Doesn't he want to find a 'new way' either?"

"He has lived all his life on the Great River. Don't upset him. You know what fury he has in him."

I did know. I remembered his amazing attack on the farm boy for turning his fish over in his bowl. Yet I could not help laughing at Su-ling's frightened earnestness.

"I am not joking," she said, looking shocked. "I am just warning."

I took all this very lightly. How many times since then have I wished that I had heeded Su-ling's warning?

She changed the subject. She asked me whether I had heard the words of the song Old Pebble had sung while the boat was on the tongue of the rapid.

I said I had been too excited by all that was happening to hear the words.

"I want to sing it for you," she said.

"Didn't you tell me the other day that it is bad luck for one who isn't a tracker to sing a tracker's song?"

"Who believes such nonsense?" she impatiently said, who had just been talking with a straight face about *fêng-shui*. "Listen!" she said. Then, in a small, controlled voice, keeping her eyes on mine with a burning intensity, she sang the haunting, twisting melody we had heard that afternoon from the midst of the rushing rapids:

"At dawn we leave Paiti in rainbow mists,
A millennium's span to Kialing we skim in a day,

From both banks the weeping of monkeys comes
like a song:
The skiff floats by ten thousand mountains of stone.

"Is that not beautiful?" she said.

"It is," I said.

"Is it not beautiful that that song lifted our heavy boat over Head Rapid this afternoon?"

"It is," I said. "That is a beautiful thought." Then abruptly I asked her, "You love him, do you not?"

Her eyes were pathetic as she replied, "Every day on the river he shows me that life is not hard."

"What hope have you?"

"What do you mean?"

"What hope have you of happiness with Old Pebble?"

"There are many kinds of happiness," she said. "I am happy to be near him," she softly said, and at that moment, just when she was asserting her joy, a look of deep, everlasting sadness drew down the corner of her sensitive mouth.

Then there was a commotion outside, and the scholar with the stupid face led the owner and the cook and the head tracker into our room.

Su-ling stood up and stepped toward the owner with her customary sweet obsequiousness.

"You should not have done it," she chided him, showing however the pride in him he would want to see.

"It was easy," he said. He was flushed and had evidently been drinking already.

"It was easy," the cook exultantly said. "It was only a matter of knowing which gate to go through."

The head tracker said nothing, but he smiled and his eyes sparkled.

Now Su-ling scarcely seemed to know Old Pebble. All her quiet attentions were for the owner.

By this time I had completely forgotten Su-ling's warning never to breathe to Old Pebble a word of my ideas for changing the Great River.

PART THREE The Dam

On Witches' Mountain Gorge I began to think more often about the dam.

Of course I had had the dam on my mind, off and on, all the way up from Ichang. I had been scanning both banks every day — but I had realized from the first that on this upriver trip I could only make cursory observations, for I would have to see the whole basin, and I would have to wait until I reached Wanhsien, where the headquarters of the boatmen's guild was situated, to study charts of topography, and records of rise and fall, and data on the cities and villages that would be submerged by the lake above a dam, before I could make a more thoroughgoing survey on the downward passage. Now, however, as the days passed, and as I began to see what a dam could mean to the human beings on the boat on which I was traveling, particularly to the trackers, the dam became more important to me than it had been when I had approached it as something theoretically and technically desirable, as an abstraction in a company memorandum and in the minds of some faraway engineers.

The head tracker seemed to have been nowhere so much at home as he was in Witches' Mountain Gorge, the longest, most beautiful, and most mysterious of all the chasms of the river. This gorge, I remember, was fully twenty miles long, and at places it was no more than a hundred and fifty yards wide, and as it afforded the river's most awesome sights to this point, so also it presented some of its most arduous problems for the trackers, and these difficulties seemed to raise Old Pebble's spirits, so that for three days he sang and flew about like a wild strong bird.

The river, which in that fantastic stretch seemed not great but

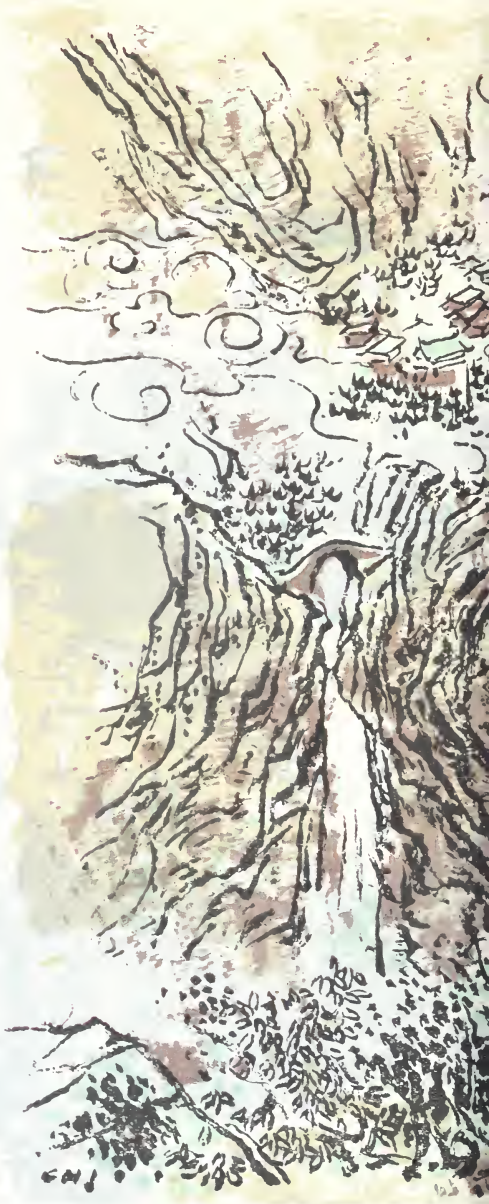
actually puny, had somehow during the ages cut its narrow brown way straight through vast rock mountains, which rose vertically from the water for hundreds of feet, then, falling back at knee-, hip-, and shoulder-terraces, rose again, and again, and again, all but perpendicular, until, seen through sudden clefts, they reached craggy pinnacles, like those of the Tetons, far up in the springtime sky. Sometimes the sky was cloud-streaked, and more than once we saw, back in the tallest ranges, a needle of rock piercing the underside of a layer of mist, and then, higher up, its point, visible and dry and gray in clear air above the thin plate of vapor. The rocks were limestone with overlying sandstone, and at the riverfront, where the softer rock had been washed away leaving the limestone sheer and upright, there were enormous up-and-down potholes in the faces of the cliffs, giving them weird, fluted surfaces. Caves could be seen high on the cliffs. Here and there villages clung to ledges, and sometimes these blue-gray hamlets straddled, with lovely high-arching bridges, little foaming bourns — one of which, I recall, poured out of the mouth of a cavern far up the side of a peak.

Going through Witches' Mountain Gorge gave me the feeling, as in the song Old Pebble had sung in the rapids of Hsintan, of skimming a thousand years in a day.

The water of the river itself was mostly deep and relatively quiet, but here and there, where jagged cliffs jutted boldly forward, or where heaps of detritus had been thrown out from streams on the banks, or where piles of enormous, square-cornered, house-sized blocks of sooty rock, which looked as if they had been blackened in a mountain-builder's furnace, had tumbled from the crags down into the sides of the channel — in such places there were eddies and cross-sets and whirlpools of unexpected violence. What a setting for a dam!

For the trackers, and particularly for Old Pebble, the gorge was an ever-changing challenge. The ingenuity of the head tracker was tested every hour, and he met each test with fiery joy. Here he led his towing gang over a mass of fallen boulders; next he put them aboard in a swarm, and they took up oars in erect ranks on the foredeck, sometimes pushing and sometimes pulling at the long

oars, and they chanted and stamped in unison and beat up a brown froth with the wooden blades, in order that the junk might ride a cross-current to the opposite bank and there have the benefit of an upstream eddy; then for a while, shouting hoarse commands unlike any other cries of his, he would supervise his men as they stood on deck and literally clawed the junk with lizards and poles and bare hands along some sheer wetted palisades; later he would lead them on their harnesses high along a little-known ledge, or over a shoulder of rock, or across a steep scree — scrambling, singing, hurrying with elated whoops from one piece of horrible work to another. Often the head tracker was in the sampan, sculling madly from the shore out to the junk to consult with the bow steersman, or standing up in the skittish boat pulling it back ashore hand over hand on the towing hawser and roaring directions to his trackers, who had only one guttural voice to answer his shouts: "Ayah! . . . Ayah! . . ."



Yes, this variable work was

obviously a delight to the head tracker. Yet I saw him, more than once, in those days, after a meal or in the early evening, altogether composed, huddled up like a great-grandmother, with a pensive face and a hint of easy-paced melancholy in his eyes. I found him one evening before dark lying on his stomach on the deck lining up a dozen peach pits, which he had been drying for the sake of their almond-like meat, in a row, and with a single chopstick flipping one over the others along the row, in a kind of tiddlywinks, and he seemed satisfied quite alone with this game for more than an hour. Yet I found that he was amazingly cultured, for he owned somewhat the same rather disturbing fund of folklore and history and myth as Su-ling: I suppose what made me persist in thinking him simple in spite of this education was the fact that his learning had all been acquired orally. I guess I thought book-learning the only true enlightenment. I remember sitting by one evening while Su-ling taught him some lines by a poet of the T'ang dynasty, Tu Fu, entitled *Unable to Visit Judge Wang Owing to Rain*. Taught him? She recited the poem once, then he perfectly repeated it, and some time later, asking her if he still had it right, pronounced it again to her without a single mistake. His mildness was deceptive. It made him seem nerveless and phlegmatic — until various crises arose, such as that when, doubling as pilot, he had tended toward the wrong sluice at New Rapids, or such as an incident which occurred a few days later in Witches' Mountain Gorge, when the young farmer boy slipped and got his foot caught between two boulders; during these crises the head tracker gave way to explosions of swiftness and violent motion, which then seemed to me mere animal reflexes, but which I now regard as having been examples of almost perfect concord between perception and action. What could be more civilized than that harmony? I remember now that he was a hypochondriac, with many a quaintly expressed anxiety about decaying muscles and shriveling tendons, but then I saw him only as a package of wonderful rhythmic power. He had a strange, halting grace, and I loved to watch him fill, tamp, light, and smoke his pipe, with its tiny brass bowl and a stem nearly three feet long — of such a length, he once said, that he could take a light from a passing junk.

Most of the time Old Pebble seemed kind, considerate, open, and warm. His moments of wrath, such as the one I had seen at the end of the gambling game that night, or when he had punished the farmer boy for turning over his fish, were rare, and they appeared to go against his nature. In those days, his goodness seemed to me innate, built-in, almost organic in him, like muscle tissue. It seemed not to be a matter of conscience and effort and struggling feeble heart. Only now on reflection, as I remember the signs of helplessness that lurked now and then momentarily in his eyes, do I see how hard he must have striven for virtue, and what a triumph of hard-working philosophy his simple goodness was. His life was a towpath; he was hauling himself wearily along it; his head and his heart were his stubborn trackers. He must have been trying his best, I now realize, to free himself from delusion, to struggle to rise above existence and pain, to speak truth, to be pure, to hurt no living thing, to have self-control, to have a wakeful mind, and rapturously to contemplate his short and awful life.

In one day we passed the first two of the twelve peaks of Witches' Mountain, and we were deep in the gorge. The water level was rising fast. The owner was taut, and the men jumpy and fractious.

We had passed a bleak, filthy village on a narrow limestone ledge, called Peishih, which means "Back to the Rock," clinging to the cliffs like an Alpinist who has lost his nerve; then soon, not far beyond it, I remember, we saw a mountain stream in whose glen nested a tranquil evergreen grove, a picture almost too delicately composed for this rugged part of China, more like a memory-scene from a Japanese screen. Thus the sudden changes of the gorges.

The head tracker was driving his men with a relentless urgency that was spurred, I suppose, by the rise of the river. He was pressing his men perhaps too hard.

While tracking with the others over an enormous heap of fallen rock, the young farmer boy who was making his first passage as a junkman, the lackluster youth whom the head tracker had thrashed downriver because he had turned over the fish in his bowl,

had the misfortune to make a misstep and to slip and wedge his ankle between two boulders, so that he gave himself great pain and, apparently thinking himself dying as he began to faint, let loose a frightful shriek. His echo, fugitive along the faces of the gorge, called pitifully back and back and back to us until it died in the distance.

Hearing the scream, Old Pebble responded with one of those seeming animal reflexes; if he thought at all of what he was doing and would do, it must have been as he moved.

Because of the narrowing of the stream by the heap of rocks the current at that place was rather swift, and the trackers were having to work fairly hard to keep the junk moving — though this was not nearly the strain they were to feel a few days later during certain moments in Wind-Box Gorge about which I must sooner or later speak.

The instant Old Pebble heard the boy's fearful cry, and long before the last reproachful echoes had faded away, he had slipped the sennit of his harness and was springing, with the most extraordinary elastic bounds and foot-clipping short jumps, like grotesque stage leaps and hops, back over the rocks alongside the fan of trackers toward the boy, who was near the ruck of the group. Before the head tracker could reach the boy, the advance of the other trackers had drawn the boy's harness tight,-and his body had begun to be dragged forward, with his foot still caught in the cleft, with a result that, under the stimulus of stretching and renewed pain, he had revived and was crying out in agony.

The drag of the boy's harness on the towline meant that his sennit could not be slipped free.

The head tracker, leaping like a rock goat along the way, saw this, swerved somewhat in his course, and simply bowled over the two hard-pulling trackers immediately forward of the boy on the towline. The sudden loss of their exertion had the effect at once of causing the pull of the junk to overpower the remaining trackers, and they fell back a few steps, and with their uncertain footings on the rocks some of them staggered (the two who had been knocked down were loudly cursing the head tracker), and for an instant the towline sagged, and during it Old Pebble slipped the

boy's harness loose. Then swiftly he attached his own harness to the towline and started to tug, and the two abusive knockdowns got back to their feet, and with wonderful choral shouts, louder than usual, the recovered gang steadied the junk and began to tow it forward again. Once the trackers were progressing, Old Pebble cast himself off once more, went back and unwedged the weeping boy and picked him up and carried him to the water's edge, where one of the foredeckmen embarked him in the sampan and took him out to the junk to a mess of evil poultices the cook had already begun to heat up.

It was the head tracker's marvelous swift response that captured my admiration at first, his split-second solicitousness when he heard a cry of pain, his finding in mid-air, as it were, the only way to save the injured boy. But there was more to it than that. His action, which could not have been mulled over in his mind, showed a deep, instinctive love of life, a compassion, an optimism, which made me feel very good — and perhaps were among the things that got me started thinking again about the dam.

That evening on deck, however, the head tracker was for some reason extremely cruel to the farmer boy, not failing to remind him every few minutes that his injury (it was bad: his ankle was as big as his thigh) was nobody's fault but his own, for having overturned the carcass of a fish aboard a river vessel.

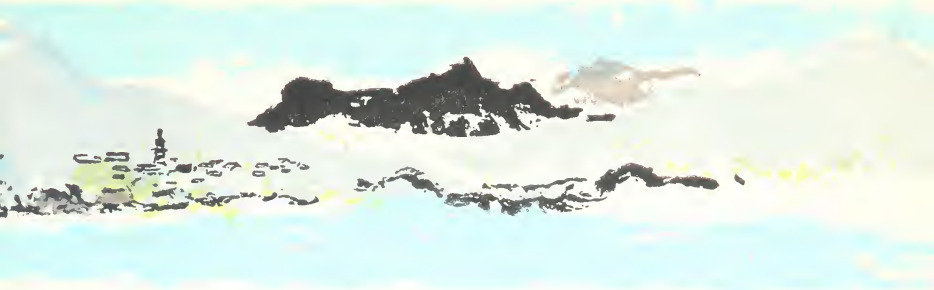
When, troubled by the boy's pain, I intervened and pointed out that until that afternoon the much-advertised consequence of the boy's ignorant blunder with the fish had been supposed to be disaster to the junk, not to himself, *I* became the receptacle of Old Pebble's scorn, and I wished I had not spoken, and I went aft and covered my ears to shut out the pursuing shouts.

I think that this perhaps was the crucial time: that I might have realized at that moment, had I been more sensitive, the extent of the head tracker's feelings toward me — feelings of suspicion and resentment and fear, which were so soon to catch on fire.

The boy, now useless, was put ashore the next morning with a few coppers of cash at a village called Tsingshih. What ever could have become of him?

THE DAY we got rid of the boy, during Old Pebble's time for a noon bowl of rice, I came on him mending a parrel, a small collar of bamboo rope which held the crude iron snatch-ring for the towing hawser against the mast, and which was therefore a vital bit of gear; I had seen him change parrels every day and check the ones he removed for chafing and splinters. What struck me now was the affectionate care with which he worked. He had a shell of callus on his palms, so that it was almost a wonder that he could make a fist at all: his fingers were all as thick as my thumbs — yet he drew out and replaced crushed strands of bamboo from the braid and fed in fresh lengths with the care and precision of a surgeon, and if the new strand did not lie absolutely flush with the rest, he would take it out and shave off a few delicate fibers with a tiny knife and thread the filament in again. Workmanship! All my life since then I have watched for such love of perfection in men who work with their hands. I would have lost my temper over that fussy work in no time, but the head tracker sat there repeating and repeating the same tiresome act with something that was more than patience — with what was evidently a true love for the thing he had in his hands and was shaping with his hands. He looked at the mellow golden collar as he might have looked into a woman's eyes, and as if to say, "You are the most beautiful parrel I have ever seen, and because I take good care of you, you would hold a junk in the tongue of a rapids for ten thousand running days for my sake, would you not?"

"That's good-looking," I said, pointing at the parrel, and I meant to sound admiring, but my words were taken, I guess, for condescension.



"This thing is not to look at," the head tracker, turning up his face in surprise, irritably said.

I felt that I had been misunderstood and that I must recover with a new compliment. "It's good to be able to do such fine work with your hands," I said, squatting down beside him.

The head tracker, like a small boy caught with dirty paws, thrust his hands behind him, out of my sight. "Not every man's son can be a scholar or a merchant," he said.

I was not so slow or naïve as to miss the force of that phrase "man's son," indicating that my privilege — having soft and useless hands — obviously could not be something I had earned myself.

I was stung by the contempt in this remark, and I wanted to show the head tracker that I knew a thing or two, and I thought of telling him that I could rig a bronze-and-wood pulley-block that would be a hundred times more efficient as a way of holding the towline than the primitive iron loop fastened to the parrel, and besides would not have to be repaired in many years' time. But the Chinese word for "pulley" would not come to me. I knew I had learned the word; I had actually thought of it on the junk a few days before, yet now it would not come to the service of my vanity. This frustration upset me even further, and I thought of my dam, and of what a crime it was that this man confronting me should have to spend the years of his life towing a junk up this dangerous river. I thought: we speak of *donkey* engines, *horse* power — how horrible to use the strength of men for the work of animals and motors!

"In my country," I said, "we have engines that would be able to haul your boats over the rapids."

Indeed I had forgotten Su-ling's warning.

Old Pebble was silent for a long time. Then in a tight, constrained voice he said, "Your engines cost too much. Everything costs too much in your country."

"Engines are cheaper than men."

"Foreign steamships have bad engines. They stop in the middle of rapids, and the steamships go on the rocks. This happens all the time. Your steamships are laid up for repairs three days for every one they spend on the river."

It was true; I had heard that the ships of the firm that was plying the Yangtze had had more than their share of bad luck. I felt sick at heart. I wanted to tell the head tracker that I had come to China with the idea of trying to help people like him. Yet I also felt compelled to let him know in some way that I was educated and he was not. I was casting about for something to say that would serve my double purpose — I was thinking of saying something of the waste of the farmer boy who had hurt his ankle the day before and had been cast ashore like refuse just that morning — when the head tracker lifted his face from his work with a very angry expression, and he said:

"Do you hear or not hear? This thing" — he shook the parrel in my face — "was not made to be looked at."

I was amazed by the ferocity with which he spoke these words, and I stood up. I turned away and went aft. I thought then of the word for "pulley." *Hua-lun,* pulley. A wooden block with a bronze sheave and roller bearings would be a thousand times better than an old bent iron snatch-ring on a bamboo parrel!

And what this river certainly needed was a dam!

The river had begun to wear on me, for I had had my fill of amazements and more than enough frights. To see one whirlpool thirty feet across, its center depressed nearly a foot below its rim, as if the water of the Great River were running off through some huge partially clogged drainpipe down to the cesspools of Hell — to see one such whirlpool was awe-inspiring, but to skirt the edges of a dozen of them every day for a week, as we had done, had quite another effect. The rise of the river level was now measurable from

hour to hour, and we had ascended some nasty races and gone around some rough turnings; two places I remember with particular distaste were known as Small-Cat Rapids and Get-Down-from-Horse Rapids. The walls of the gorge were high; we were in a monstrous ditch of rock.

The second evening in Witches' Mountain Gorge, just after we had spar-moored for the night against a big boulder in a quiet cove, and while most of the trackers rested on their haunches on the rocks ashore, sipping tea, I sat alone on the conning deck watching blossoms of sunset unfold on the edges of the small delicate misty shrub-like clouds that stood naturalized in the visible sky over the gorge upstream — when all at once I imagined a dam.

There it was! Between those two sheer cliffs that tightened the gorge a half-mile upstream, there leaped up in my imagination a beautiful concrete straight-gravity dam which raised the upstream water five hundred feet; much of its curving span was capped by an overflow spillway controlled by drum gates and tube valve outlets, and a huge hydraulic jump apron designed to pass unprecedented volumes of water stood ready to protect both the dam and the lower countryside against the freshets of springtime. Ingenious lift-locks at either side carried junks up and down on truly hydraulic elevators. The power plant was entirely embedded in the cliffs on both sides of the river. The strength of the Great River, rushing through the diversion tunnels that had been used for the construction of the dam, and through other great tubes and shafts bored through solid rock, and finally into the whirling gills of nearly a hundred power units, created a vast hum of ten million kilowatts of light and warmth and progress flowing out through high-hanging wires over six widespread provinces. Away through pipelines flowed, too, unimaginable numbers of acre-feet of water, irrigating lands that after the harvest would feed, let me say, seventy-five million Chinese. A terrible annual flood, now making up as the river rose toward its high water level, was leashed in advance by this beautiful arc. Beyond the tall barrier, junks sailed forward with their wares, to Chungking and farther, as on a placid lake.

This picture in my mind became unbearably exciting. I had to share it. I ran forward through the mat archway of the main cabin and beyond the mast found Su-ling, perched on a capstan with folded legs, and the head tracker and the cook, squatting on the deck before her. They were talking in low voices.

I tried to tell them what I had seen in my mind.

They must have thought at first that I was quite mad, perhaps from fear of the Great River's churning waters. I stood there, flushed and eager-eyed, I suppose, pointing at the site and trying to build my dam again out of Chinese words and gestures, and trying to convey to them an idea of the miracles of power, irrigation, flood-control, and navigation that this lovely structure would have produced; especially of navigation, for I thought that would appeal to them. No rapids, no whirlpools, no currents, no pilots, no tracking! I was carried away and felt sure they would understand me.

The response I got was a horrifying one.

Old Pebble stood up. I was surprised to see that he was in a fury — though his anger was in check, like a line under tension belayed to a cleat.

Then I saw Su-ling look at the head tracker with an expression of great anxiety, and afterwards she turned her eyes on me in dismay, and her glance made me feel an utter fool. What had I done?

Then I remembered her warning not to speak to Old Pebble about changing the Great River. I felt hot all over.

I looked at Old Pebble again. He stood as straight and stiff as a stanchion. I expected violence.

He gave me worse than that. He turned with calm arrogance toward Su-ling and the cook and began to talk as if I had not been there in a different dialect of Chinese — Hunanese, perhaps — of which I could understand not a syllable. I had the impression he was going straight forward with the conversation the three of them had been enjoying before I had rushed in with my crazy arm-waving interruption, and it was more than an impression, it was a patent fact, that with this change of language he had simply obliterated me. I had a body, I stood on the deck, I breathed still

a little hard from the thrill I had had, I was able to see him move his mouth and the others nod, laugh, and blink; but I did not exist. I was not merely foreign. I was wiped out.

THE NEXT morning there was a fog in the gorge so thick that we could barely see the rocks against which we were spar-moored. We could not think of moving until it had melted away. We were enveloped, not only in fog, but also in a profound silence. Even the rumoring of the fast-rising water seemed hushed. Then in the far distance, as I sat on the conning deck, I heard first a low throbbing, then, somewhat later and very faintly, a falsetto chant and the guttural "Ayah! . . . Ayah! . . ." of many crewmen shouting as they stood and pushed oars on the foredeck of a downgoing junk and the repeated sounds of their feet stamping all together on the deck as they lunged with each beat of the oars, and the repeated thumps of their many oars all together against the tholepins; and this pulsating noise, seeming to carry on its shoulders, as it were, the thin sad song of that junk's Noise Suppressor, grew louder and louder in the otherwise silent morning, until it seemed an almost unbearable pounding roar. It was a terrible, fearful, tragic sound, wrapped in fog. It was like an unendurable idea forcing itself up to recognition through the murk of the lower mind. For me the unendurable idea forcing itself upward at that moment was that perhaps Old Pebble was right: perhaps the Great River could not and should not be challenged by such as I; perhaps a millennium-in-a-day was after all not something that could be *bestowed*. . . . Suddenly, not ten feet from our port side, a great junk like our own loomed out of the thick morning, and I saw for a few moments the frantic motions of the crew that went with the sounds I had heard, and then the junk was gone, and the noises diminished, until at last I heard only a deep, rhythmical thumping again, and then nothing at all; absolute silence. I wondered what whips of guilt or greed or fear could be driving a crazy owner along the Great River in such weather. . . . And my doubt, like the junk, was gone in the mists.

Later Su-ling came out to me and sat down to talk. It was strange: she made no mention at all of what had happened the

previous afternoon. I kept expecting her to reproach me, but she spoke to me in her usual way, as a teacher, and soon the sad, fearful night-thoughts that had troubled me after my vision of the dam and my brush with the head tracker vanished. Su-ling seemed more charming than she ever had to me, for the thick air of the morning hung a veil between us, a delicate gauze of moisture which seemed to smooth her hair and mollify her bright sharp eyes. She was, as she had always been toward me, amiable — wanting to teach and please; she told me stories of the mist, which is forever personified, in the lore of the Great River, as a lovely woman, a seductive princess, a girl of uncommon beauty and warmth. Where, in these poetic stories, were the vagueness, the hazard, the chill, the marrow-dampness of the fog that was actually around us, through which that solitary junk had rushed with its demonic crescendo and fading away a few minutes before?

Soon the head tracker joined us, and, to my very great surprise, he seemed casual and friendly. His manners were very good; he seemed kindly toward me. Su-ling still addressed herself to me, and much of the time Old Pebble just sat and listened, really something of an outsider in our conversation. He intruded only to suspend footnotes from Su-ling's tales, and when he spoke, with his curious rhythmic gestures and metronomic clicks of the tongue, he seemed to be trying to improve my entertainment.

Perhaps I should have thought it was queer that he had no apparent reaction to what had happened the day before. Perhaps I should have searched his face for the too-shrewd look I had seen there on other occasions when he had lied or teased or mocked. Su-ling had soothed me; I thought the whole affair of the previous day had blown over.

For some reason, perhaps because of the rise in the level of the river during the night, one of the long bamboo spars that braced the junk offshore, while hawsers and spring lines held the craft securely in place, came loose from its footing on a rock and fell into the water. The purchase of this spar against the junk had been well aft, and so our talk on the conning deck was interrupted by a rush of crewmen to re-establish the fallen pole. As I stood and watched, Su-ling and the head tracker stayed close

on either side of me; we were much jostled by the overactive repairmen.

Presently the mooring had been reset, and we three took up again our pleasant talk. Again I felt as if I were a kind of honored guest, and I was complacent.

Gradually the sun burned away the mist, and the illusion of privacy it had given me with the girl and Old Pebble slipped away, as the vague enclosure around us withdrew and we began to have glimpses of the amazing gorge.

The crew began to stir. Old Pebble went forward and beat a gong, which was not to assemble the men for work, as I thought, but was intended, Su-ling told me, to drive away once and for all the dragons of bad weather. This was the man who could not bear to listen to an engineer speak of motors and ships and pulleys which, along with my beautiful dam, would some day surely improve this treacherous highway of water!

We weighed spars and went on.

Not long afterward I discovered that my watch was no longer in my pocket. I rummaged through my gear. It was gone.

TOGETHER they had tricked me, Su-ling and the devious tracker; there was no other explanation. That jostling! That was when it had happened! I felt very bitter toward Su-ling, the memory of whose gentle instruction curdled in my mind. I sulked that morning. I could not bring myself to accuse Su-ling, and just then I dared not accuse the head tracker; I knew about "face," I knew the danger of allowing a humiliation to be explicitly seen, so I held my tongue and felt lonely and homesick. We were still in that most spectacular of gorges, but my engineering optimism had vanished, my altruism had shriveled up, and my pride stung like a slapped cheek.

Though my watch had not been working, and might never again have run, and was therefore probably useless as a watch, nevertheless I very much wanted it as property; I wanted it with a disgusting greed; I wanted it just then more than I wanted to understand or be understood.

It was mid-afternoon before Su-ling came out of the cabin on

some errand that was going to hurry her forward right past me with only a nod and a hasty innocent smile, but I stopped her and asked her to chat, and she sat down as if she had plenty of time for me, and she looked at me perfectly calmly as she began some anecdote or other, and I could see the tight, sweet gather of sadness at the corner of her mouth, and I began to hear her magical soft voice instructing me.

I waited a very long time before I quietly said I would like to have my watch back.

Su-ling looked at me with big eyes and pretended not to know what I was talking about.

I repeated and insisted, being very careful to keep my voice even and low.

As to that, Su-ling said, rising and starting forward on her errand and looking at me more or less sweetly, it would be advisable for me to consult the owner of the junk; he was the custodian of everything on the junk that was lost, or misplaced, or ownerless, or in dispute. She left me.

I was furious — partly, I suppose, because I could not tell whether Su-ling was innocent. She surely seemed so. Perhaps Old Pebble had stolen the watch on his own.

I had not the inclination, as perhaps I had not the courage, to beard the owner about my watch, as Su-ling had suggested.

Instead I bottled up my anger and lay in wait for Old Pebble.

Across his mid-afternoon rice bowl I accosted him, as he squatted on the foredeck, and in a ridiculous, trembling voice, which I was obliged to keep low because other trackers were all around, I demanded the return of my watch. I had to make two or three false starts, because just as I tried to speak, the first times, the head tracker called out some instructions about hawsers, sampan, and whatnot to certain of his men. Then at last, acknowledging that he was aware of my quiet stammering over him, he turned an open, kindly face up toward mine and waited for me to speak.

I spoke, and his face turned blank.

A watch? he said. What watch? Had the young man had a watch? What kind of watch? A watch? What had happened to the watch?

I said through clenched teeth that he knew perfectly well what watch and what had happened to the watch.

Then the head tracker asked in a loud but matter-of-fact voice, as if trying to be helpful, whether anybody had happened to steal a watch from the young foreigner.

The trackers went on eating with the good appetites of athletes. There was not a flicker of humor in any eye that I could see, but I could *feel* the mockery running around.

The head tracker told me, as if confidentially, that there was nothing but turtle dung — by which he evidently meant his trackers — on the foredeck; certainly there was no watch there. Perhaps the cook had stolen the watch.

I said that I had a very good idea who had stolen it and that I wanted it back.

The head tracker shook his head. "Then the Old Big must have stolen the watch," he gravely said. "That is hard to believe. It seems not to be like the Old Big. I have respect for the Old Big. I know nothing about a stolen watch. I did not know you had a watch. Watches belong in cities. On a junk we tell time by sunrise and sunset and getting hungry. Here on a junk we keep time in our heads. That is my whole work in life, to keep time in my head for the trackers' footsteps. I have nothing to do with watches."

I went aft, perspiring. I had lost face badly, I knew, and I was very angry with myself for having spoken a word about the theft. He had trimmed me very skillfully and made me a laughingstock. Thenceforth, whenever there would be a burst of laughter among the trackers, forward, I would be obliged to think they were savoring over again the head tracker's handling of the angry young foreigner. Why had he stolen the watch? Was it because my watch was a threat to the timepiece in his head? Was it because my dam was a threat to his very existence?

About an hour later Su-ling, who had gone up forward for some hot tea and had stayed to talk there awhile, came back. I was alone on the conning deck. She came straight to me and in a furious whisper she said: "You foreign devil! Why did you speak about changing the river in front of him that way yesterday? I warned you!"

My anger over the watch, and my shame at having lost face, stirred me and I challenged her: "What harm was there in it? Why are you so excited about it now?"

"What harm? Old Pebble is three-quarters crazy over what you said — that's the harm."

"He did not seem the least bit crazy when he sat with us this morning, or when I talked to him not long ago at rice-time."

"He would not show you how he feels! He has been saying all kinds of wild things all day. Now he says he thinks you brought a curse on board; he says you are trying to spoil the river for us all." She no longer seemed angry with me; only afraid. "I don't know what he'll do," she miserably said.

PART FOUR The Path

WE DROPPED our moorings and got ready to track into Wind-Box Gorge against a swift current early in the morning under a light haze.

The river was rising very fast. While our trackers were laying out their lines, a down-bound junk passed us. Its bow steersman shouted across to us that the river had risen thirty feet in three days on Goose-Tail Rock at the upper mouth of the gorge. Su-ling had told me about this great sentinel-rock, which in wintertime at low water looks, she had said, like a huge reclining tiger; in summer it vanishes under the flood waters. As she had described it, I concluded that it must have been bigger than the Sphynx of Gizeh. Now it was almost wholly submerged, and in a few days, when it would be covered, the authorities would take its disappearance as their accustomed cue to shut down river traffic altogether, until the waters would fall and the danger abate. Ours would be among the last few junks to go up.

During the readying, Old Pebble seemed to be everywhere, and he wore a scowling look but he sang snatches of song and appeared to be highly elated.

For a while he rushed about on errands of superstition. I saw him secretively burning joss paper in the cook's brazier — circlets of paper that were shiny like foil, with square holes cut in them, shapes of copper cash with which he paid tribute to venal deities. Then he hurried aft and for the first time on our journey hoisted on a pennant-halyard the owner's masthead device, which had the double use of showing that our Old Big was a Wanhsien man and of keeping off evil spirits. It was a gay rig on a light bamboo staff, consisting of a square blue flag, then above that two oblong pennants, one red, one yellow, and at the very peak a pair of wobbly metal springs, which drooped like the antennae of a moth from the topmost point of the whole junk, and which had at their tips two tiny bells of piercingly brilliant call. All day long they poured on us their small globular sounds, like uncatchable drops of mercury. After he had hoisted the emblem, Old Pebble ran to his tiny bundle of private possessions at the head of his sleeping-mat in the crew's cabinway, fumbled in it a moment, then trotted back to the conning deck and with a comically set blank face handed Su-ling a pair of earrings which had little red glass pendants on them, and he told her to put them on "to keep the boat dry." It seemed to me that she was on the verge of weeping as she took them from him.

Old Pebble may have taken other precautions that I did not see. If his fetishes, charms, and luck-pieces could help us, we must have been hazard-proof.

Not knowing what we were going into, I inwardly ridiculed all these devices. What good, I asked myself, was the sort of bravery they gave? Later in the day, however, when the real force of the water had come home to me, I caught myself thinking angrily about my stolen watch; I must admit I wanted the comfort of it in my pocket then, as if there might have been safety in the habit of carrying that golden wafer of the hours.

The head tracker discussed the day's tactics with the owner. When their conference ended I saw the owner permit himself a rare, if perhaps partly ironical, gesture to his Noise Suppressor. To

wish Old Pebble a good day's work, he brought together two clenched fists and bowed slightly to him, in the pantomime of humility and would-be servitude that a Chinese host accords a notable guest.

The head tracker snorted the required formal protest, giving it, however, a note of derision: "Don't be polite!"

Su-ling was standing by, and the head tracker turned to her, continuing his satire of manners, and said, "The fruit blossom will have her petals shaken today."

Su-ling laughed and gave back a mocking answer, "The strong branches also tremble when the petals shake."

The head tracker puckered his lips and bowed.

Now these speeches had been read broadly by the crude beggarly man and the unpolished river woman, and it had been obvious that they were making fun of an elegant tone that was far above their heads, but I saw the owner lift his eyebrows in chagrin at the highly charged words. He was as tense as he had been anywhere on the river.

A light up-wind had arisen, and in a deep bull-roar Old Pebble ordered the big lugsail hoisted, so he and his trackers would have every possible ounce of help against the fierce current of the gorge.

I was always fascinated by the seamanship of the junkmen. Their rigging and their ways of handling it, mostly thousands of years old, were in some respects as good as anything we had on our newest sailing vessels in the West. I went forward to watch the beautiful ceremony of halyards and sheets. In this Old Pebble had usually taken part as if it were a game, with open childish pleasure, jumping and shouting among the lines. Today he worked with a grave concentration. I had the bad luck to get in his way just as he was trying to clear the multiple sheets and trim them, and he turned on me with an expression far from playful and startled me by saying, "Why don't you go back where you came from?" It must have been pure chance that had made him hit on a question in those terms, which reverberated like an echo from my childhood, when I had often heard that same challenge hurled at the Poles and Italians who were coming into the valleys of my home

state — and had in ignorant brutality used it myself. Perhaps he had only meant that I should go back to the afterdeck, and perhaps it had been merely a trick of translation in my head that had given his question this wider and more ominous sense. I did return to the conning deck, and did for a moment wish myself far away at home.

THEN Old Pebble was ferried ashore in the sampan, and we got under tow and entered the last gorge.

A spit at the lower end of the gorge seemed to dam up the water in a kind of reservoir above, so that within a dozen boat lengths there was a visible rise of nearly a foot in the water level. There was no turbulence. The river was simply an uphill slope. The current was alarmingly swift, and we hung fire on the sliding hill of water for nearly half an hour, moving forward literally inch by inch.

I was struck at the very outset by a new sound in Old Pebble's voice as he sang the tracking songs. There was a note of urgency in it, a kind of straining, it seemed to me, that I had not heard before. I saw that as Old Pebble worked he was forever looking this way and that, now at the slick river, now at the pale-gray mountains, now back at the junk at the end of the towline.

The owner ran forward and shouted to the drummer, commanding him to signal Old Pebble to reduce the tempo of his song, because the trackers, the Old Big cried, would need their greatest strength farther upstream and must save it here. On his way aft the owner muttered that Old Pebble knew the river; what was wrong with him this morning?

Above that first slick plane the river was violent and erratic, like a frightened thing that runs this way and that, uncertain where to make its final rush. Sometimes the trackers took a whole minute to gather strength for a new six-inch step; then suddenly the upcurve of a whirlpool would seize the junk, and for ten paces the men would actually have to hurry to keep the hawser tight. So we faltered and started and slowly persisted upstream.

I had never felt the junk shiver so hard or heard it creak so loud. All the time the tiny bells at the masthead jingled.

AT THAT phase of water in the river, fast rising toward mid-level, approaching the period of real danger, the upper and lower ends of Wind-Box Gorge were its severe passages, and between, for nearly four miles, there was a haul which was, as much of Witches' Mountain Gorge had been, awesome but not deadly fearful. Once we had budged through the lower gate, with the swift slope and then the stretch of vicious chopping currents, we went forward moderately well; which is not to say that we entirely escaped the surprises, some of them very offensive, of strong oversets, whirlpools, races, and eddies.

When we moved into this middle section of the gorge, Su-ling went into the after-cabin and fetched the wooden gaming board and the inlaid sandalwood box of "stones," and she engaged the owner in play on the conning deck; this seemed to be his opium, for he indulged in it a lot during the tense passages of the river. Having been given lessons in the game, I was permitted now to sit by and watch. Whenever the junk suffered a bad lurch or sheared away from shore or seemed stuck in the water for good, whenever we felt the most unpleasant sensations of dipping, swaying, and yawing, whenever we heard the most importunate ringing of the masthead bells, the owner rose to his feet in one of his passing furies, rushed forward, shouted as if to the cliffs and skies, and soon came back looking quite happy.

During the game, the owner talked with his wife about business matters; this was a sort of nervous habit with him. Mostly he complained in advance of bad luck he expected to have. With a really profound pessimism he catalogued the setbacks he would surely encounter.

"After this trip our Noise Suppressor is going to leave us," the owner gloomily said, among other things, to Su-ling.

"Has he told you that?" she asked. I saw a brief flicker of alarm and dismay in her eyes — but I had seen all the way up the river what skill she had in hiding her feelings; and in a moment there was no sign of what the Old Big's words had done to her.

"He has said nothing; I feel it."

"Because of what? Does he think we give him bad rice?"

"It's not that."

"Doesn't he like us?"

"He likes us," the owner said, with an unpleasant squint, bearing down harder than he needed to on the plural pronoun.

"Perhaps it is just a mood that will leave him in a few days," Su-ling said, and she looked hastily at me, and I knew what she meant — that Old Pebble would be all right as soon as I got off the junk.

"No, this is not a passing mood."

"What is it?" Su-ling asked.

"He is tired of the river. He hates the Great River."

I was so surprised to hear the owner say this, for I thought him very wrong, that I found myself blurting out some kind of contradiction.

"What do you know about the river?" he asked, turning on me.

I said, not much, but that I knew a little about people, and that I had been spending a great deal of time watching the head tracker on this trip, and that he seemed to me a rarely happy man.

Just then the junk trembled, the bells called, and instead of running forward the owner responded with a thrust of anger at me. "I hear you have mad ideas about putting a mountain into a gorge and interfering with the Great River," he said. I looked quickly at Su-ling, who must have told the owner about my idea of a dam in Witches' Mountain Gorge; she innocently regarded me, with the face of a child who remembers only virtuous acts. With a terrible scorn the junkmaster threw a question at me: "What makes you think *you* could lift a mountain?"

"In my country we have machinery . . . ," I humorlessly began, but he cut me off, addressing Su-ling.

"Our Noise Suppressor has had enough. He wants to be a farmer now. He wants to watch yellow rape blow in the wind. He wants to get wet only up to his ankles" — in rice paddies, I supposed the owner meant.

"I will be sorry to see him go," Su-ling said. It was one of the formulas over the game of "stones" that Su-ling should dully regret future losses when the Old Big confidently predicted them. Perhaps this time she had spoken her regret too feelingly; the owner looked at her sharply. She protected herself at once by

seeming to be worried for the Old Big. "What will you do without him?" she asked.

The owner did not answer her but turned and spoke to me in a suddenly gentle tone. "There comes a time," he said, "when every riverman has had enough. I, too, have been studying our Noise Suppressor on this trip. He sings badly. He wants to farm. He sings badly."

Yet at that very moment we could hear the wonderful lusty towing chant of the head tracker, and the voice was clear, fierce, defiant, manly, and, it seemed to me, full of love of life and of work and of feelings of all kinds.

"I don't know what I would do without him," the Old Big said, and he gave up a sigh that was almost a groan.

Did all the other men on the junk share this fixed idea of "enough" on the Great River? Could this belief have helped to account for the terrifying indifference all around me during those moments later that day in Wind-Box Gorge?

I WENT forward. The cook greeted me as I sat down on a coil of bamboo hawser. He was scrubbing an iron bowl, using filthy cold river water.

I asked how long he thought it would take us to get through Wind-Box Gorge.

He replied that the upper gate of the gorge would be very bad. At Goose-Tail Rock it would be very bad.

I said he had a way of responding to questions but not answering them.

He said that if we were not out of the gorge by dusk we would never get out. How could he tell how bad it would be at the upper end of the gorge? He asked me that.

"Does our Noise Suppressor want to leave this boat?" I asked.

The cook put on his roguish expression and said, "I can say this: He wants certain people to leave the boat."

Of course he meant me, and perhaps I should have rewarded him with a laugh. But I pursued my line: "Is he tired of the river?"

"Tired of the river? Does a tree get tired of growing?"

"The Old Big thinks he has had enough."

"Maybe the Old Big has had enough."

Soon Su-ling came forward from her game with the owner to tell me to look up at a cliff we were passing, high on which, in huge cracks in the solid rocks, a number of curious dark oblong box-like objects were wedged. Perhaps they were bronze or stone coffins. How had human beings lodged them there? Su-ling said they resembled the bellows of a Chinese blacksmith's forge; hence the name of the gorge.

The cook asked Su-ling what the owner would want to eat for his afternoon meal, and she said that after Wind-Box Gorge he would be hungry, that he would be able to get himself around a pullet in some soup and some fried white cabbage and some turnips; and in perfect confidence she went on with an entire menu to meet a grotesque appetite the Old Big would have when the tension of this passage was over.

The cook grunted, neither pleasantly nor angrily, at each item on her list, as if merely making a mental checkmark with his throat muscles.

Su-ling went aft.

The cook unlocked the great chest of his perishable treasures and rummaged and took out a small head of cabbage and some turnips, and he settled in a squatting position on the deck near the port scuppers and began to peel the turnips over the side.

He began humming a weird falsetto accompaniment to the head tracker's distant chant. I say weird; it was indeed. It was not so much a harmony; it was rather a kind of stitching to the other tune, a thread that was put in, drawn tight, and pulled out again, neatly and regularly.

Old Pebble's singing had an intensity now that made it very moving; it seemed to sharpen my sense of hearing.

The sampan, towing alongside the junk on the starboard hand, its bamboo painter fast on a pair of tholepins, kept bumping against the heavy half-round wales running along the side of the turreted hull. This bumping, along with the junk's heartbeat, voiced by the drum, and the tinkling of the masthead bells, and the trackers' sob-like shouts, and the cook's penetrating humming, and the creaking of tons of twisting cypress beneath us, and the hard occa-

sional crack of the owner's raging voice, and Su-ling's soft words, and the insistent swish of the river, and above all Old Pebble's burning songs — all were mixed together in the seashell of my inner ear into a rhythmic rushing sound that came and went, a kind of panting of excitement, terror, and wonder.

THE TRACKERS climbed high across a hip of shingle and entered the beginning of a path routed by hand from the face of one of the cliffs. This seemed to me the most terrible place on the whole river.

Men working with chisels had cut out of the steep cliff a running rectangle of rock to make this path. It was scooped out of the flat face of the mountain, which was too perpendicular to permit an ordinary ledge being formed. The path had a ceiling, an inner wall, and a floor of solid rock; all it had for outer wall was peril. It ran more or less, but not exactly, on a horizontal plane; wherever possible, it followed strata of rock, presumably along the softer faults in the limestone.

I can still see vividly in my mind's eye Old Pebble entering that dangerous place.

I remember that in the gorge itself, that day, the sight gave me a sickening feeling, and now, these many years later, the memory of it still faintly does.

The cliff was sheer, rising at an angle, I would say, of more than eighty degrees; I have a distinct impression that in some places in Wind-Box Gorge parts of the mighty precipices actually overhang the river. Where it began, the path was about thirty feet above the surface of the water, so that from the deck of the junk we looked up at it, more than half the height of our mast. Su-ling told me that in winter, at low water, at what the rivermen call "zero," the path would be more than sixty feet above the surface, while late in the spring, perhaps a month after we were there, it would be nearly as much, or more, under the surface. When the melted snows of many mountains of Tibet course toward the sea, and when, riding the crests of those thaws, the run-off of spring rains that have fallen on half a million square miles of Chinese hills flows too down the Great River, its power becomes unimaginable, even to a hopeful young hydraulic engineer.

These were the very cliffs against which, in its record year, the river had climbed in a short time two hundred and seventy-five feet.

What giddied me then, and still does now, about this awful path was not just its hazardous appearance: I was most intensely disturbed by the sense it gave me of the gap between the Chinese on the junk and myself, between Su-ling and myself, between the head tracker singing his beautiful chanteys and myself, between those to whom I was supposed to provide modern wonders of engineering and myself, a putative agent of provision. To begin with, the path was more than a thousand years old, so Su-ling said: T'ang dynasty, she said, and perhaps earlier. Chinese rivermen had been satisfied for a millennium — for more than five times the whole age of my native country — to use this awful way of getting through Wind-Box Gorge. How could I, in the momentary years of my youth, have a part in persuading these people to tolerate the building of a great modern dam that would take the waters of Tibet and inner China, with their age-old furies, on its back, there to grow lax and benign? How could I span a gap of a thousand years — a millennium in a day? These people on the junk could be said to be living in the era between Charlemagne and William the Conqueror, in the time of serfs and villeins, before the Crusades, before Western printing and gunpowder, long, long before Chaucer and Giotto and Thomas Aquinas and Dante. And they were satisfied (or so I thought) to exist in Dark Ages, while I lived in a time of enlightenment and was not satisfied.

The sight of that path made me wonder whether a dam was the right thing with which to start closing the gap.

There was something else about the path: I could not help feeling the incredible patience that had gone into its making. Surely only one man at a time could have worked there, hammering and chiseling out fragments of stone and dropping the pieces into the river below. How many years did these miles of jeopardous corridor take to cut? What patience! What all-enduring patience! And what a chasm between such patience and my hasty world! I was a young man who grew easily bored; more than a few weeks at any one engineering problem gave me a feeling of stagnation,

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and of wasting the magic of my youth. Suppose I had been called upon to cut stone on a path like this for fifty years of my life, to be relieved then by my son? What if I had been called upon to haul a junk through this path all my life? Old Pebble had this patience. The cook had been right to compare him to a tree; he endured his Sisyphus life with the same patience as a tree its growth.

Worst of all was this: The one-sided corridor cut from the cliffs was just high enough for trackers leaning forward on their halters, towing heavy weights, creeping almost; a man could not stand straight on his two feet in that space. In ten centuries this corridor had never been enlarged, but had been left the same height — a proper height for straining trackers, it seemed, not for men walking erect, proud, and unharnessed. I thought of debased men I had read about, but I could not imagine any more enslaved, more doomed, than the trackers who traversed that tight path, with a mountain of stone pressing on their shoulderblades and death off the edge to the left. Yet what a broad grin Old Pebble had used to wear at night, who had trudged through that horrible path a hundred times; what devils of happiness in his eyes sometimes!

THE STRAIN of Old Pebble's towing was great. He leaned so far forward that his hands groped and clawed along the ground. His body was leashed, but his head was free, and it moved all around, and I could see his wild excited eyes darting here and there and everywhere, searching, searching. . . .

Sometimes the hollow of the cut-out path acted as a baffle, and the trackers' shouts — "Ayah! . . . Ayah! . . ." — came down to us queerly overblown; at other times the cries were muffled, as if the sounds had fallen right into the swallowing water.

Some of the men were obviously fear-bound by the place they were in, for they cringed against the inner wall as they towed, scraping shoulders and arms along the already flesh-smoothed rock, as far from the edge as could be. I saw the eyes of some of them, gazing down on the dangerous gutter with the moody stare that sometimes covers man's terror, while the eyes of others wore no such curtains but glanced out in frank awful fear. Still others

could not even dare look outward, but kept their faces turned to the beloved limestone that supported them.

Old Pebble's face showed no fear. I saw it, now and then, and it was contorted by an expression of eagerness, of yearning, of passion. His eyes restlessly roved the gorge, from mountaintop to churning flood, searching. . . .

Suddenly the wild look on Old Pebble's face made me feel a rush of anxiety, and I felt sick at my stomach.

Could this river be dammed before such as he were ready to have it dammed?

I went aft. I kneeled by the game board, fighting my nausea. I put my hand on my watch pocket and wanted my stolen watch to be there.

Su-ling and the owner, with the sandalwood board between them, were calmly moving the wooden pips, trying with sweet mutual patience to outflank, capture, annihilate. Su-ling said to me, "Tonight we anchor at Kweifu. It will be dark when we get there. In the morning you will see the salt boileries. They say the place has the smell of the sea, and when we get there I want to ask you if that is true."

I was wonderfully calmed by her assurance of our arrival at a new anchorage. "Have you never been to the sea?" I asked her.

"I have been to Ichang," she said, as if she knew not where the sea might be, "and I have been to Chungking. Once I walked north from the Great River seventy-five li to visit my maternal grandmother, but when I reached her village they said she was dead. . . . Tell me: What does the sea smell like?"

"Some other time," I said, and getting unsteadily to my feet I went forward again, for though I still felt ill, I had to watch.

AGAIN I settled on the coil of bamboo rope.

I saw that Old Pebble's eyes were sweeping a cliff on the opposite side of the river, across from the tracking path. His excited gaze climbed from the water level to the very top of the cliff.

I turned toward the far side of the river. There, in a zigzag pattern up a perpendicular rock seven hundred feet high, ran a series of square holes, six inches across, I would say, and a foot or so

deep. Su-ling had told me downriver about these holes, and sitting on the foredeck earlier in the day I had been looking for them. They marked the ladder of Mêng Liang, the general of the Eastern Kingdom, in the Sung dynasty, whose ships had been shut into Wind-Box Gorge and were trapped there by great chains across the river, while the army of the Western Kingdom camped in smug security on top of the mountain above; but soldiers of Mêng Liang, starting from the bottom, cut these holes with hammer and chisel, inserted beam ends in them, then, squatting on the beams that stuck straight out from the cliff, cut higher holes, until they had made a ladderway enough for a seventy-storey building, and at last a whole army climbed up the terrible exposed stairway and defeated its surprised enemy. And what had given Mêng Liang's men the patience and courage to do all this? I felt sure they had simply looked at the trackers' path cut from the stone across the way, and perhaps thought of trackers hauling junks along it; exactly as Old Pebble and his ragged companions were hauling ours these hundreds of years later.

What patience! What everlasting endurance! This patience was not simply a matter of resignation, for it had in it a large measure of determination, even of aspiration. . . .

I looked back up at Old Pebble again in the scooped-out path. He was still gazing across at the ladder holes, and there was the same look on his face of ecstasy-in-work as he had worn at the rapids of Hsintan. Perhaps he felt for a moment a tug of the aspiration I had seen in those zigzag marks on the cliff. Or perhaps the holes up the wall of the gorge, so old, so familiar, gave him a feeling of certainty that the Great River would never change.

Suddenly he broke off the chantey he had been singing, a harsh lament of a scholar who had won honors at court but had lost a love at home. For three whole groan-shouts by the others there was no song at all.

Then Old Pebble broke into the most amazing song I had ever heard from him; a whirling, spiraling, soaring sound of pure joy. It seemed to me to be wordless. He was pulling now with all his strength; he held one arm reaching forward, as if that would hurry him. Still he looked across at the marks on the reddish cliff.

His song now was like a miracle — as wonderful as the first crying of a newborn child.

The junk was tending out into the stream as it fetched around a projecting bluff, at the upper side of which the big creaking boat was suddenly taken into a nasty race of swirling water, full of froth and splashes. We were coming near the upper gate of the gorge. The water was horrible. It looked like the rushing, sucking, billowing wake of the ocean liner on which I had crossed the Pacific.

Old Pebble still stared across the river. His face had a look of great happiness or great pain — much like faces of people caught in photographs of terrible disasters, their mouths drawn by agony into seeming smiles. His song was thrilling. He strained wildly at his harness.

"Ayah! . . . Ayah! . . ."

I watched him very closely, for I wanted to try to guess what was in his mind.

Just then, at the very crest of a climbing line of wordless song, he lost his footing.

I SAW him go down. He had been pulling so hard on the towline that a slight slip of one foot was enough to throw him flat. I stood up on the pitching deck, and I believe I uttered a cry. The head tracker seemed at first not to be trying to rise. I remembered his agility in bounding over ten thousand rocks coming up the river, yet now he lay at first inert, like a man either dead or dreaming. The other trackers still strained at their ropes and still called out their slow time-beating shouts, and the cook hummed. The trackers moved forward, and the junk moved forward, inch by inch.

Suddenly the head tracker began to writhe on the stone pathway. Was he hurt?

The hands of the almost creeping second tracker had come up to the prostrate man's feet. I saw the hands grasp the leader's ankles and move them to one side, toward the river.

Old Pebble rolled and doubled up and gave out his first shriek, a terrible piercing salute to his fate, which he recognized, I guess, long before I did.

I glanced at the river. My thoughts were selfish. What would the men up there do to us? They could not slacken their efforts! I grew dizzy for a moment as I remembered the reeling of the junk that time in much easier water in Witches' Mountain Gorge when the farmer boy had caught his foot and the head tracker had knocked two other trackers off the rope; I steadied myself, grasping the mat cowling of the main cabin.

Again I looked up at the path. There was a kind of struggle going on. The head tracker seemed to be trying to slip his sennit off the towline so he could get out of the way of the trackers. They were moving forward. They were practically on him. Apparently the sennit would not relax its grip on the hawser.

Then the head tracker fell off the edge of the path, screaming as he fell. His towing harness brought him up short, and he swung there against the rock wall, some ten feet below the path and perhaps twice that much above the surface of the water.

With one more agonized unison groan, the trackers halted. The first two men huddled against the inner wall of the pathway, bearing the weight of the head tracker and also their share of the pull of the boat.

THERE are many things about those few moments of which I am not sure, and which puzzle me. For one thing, I do not know whether the head tracker had fallen of his own choice or had been turned off the ledge by the trackers who followed him. He had been in their way; he had seemed unable to get free. I had seen the second man push aside the head tracker's legs — toward the river — in order that the second tracker and the others might keep towing, keep moving. I do not know exactly what had happened. The head tracker had been an admired and necessary man, and perhaps one who was loved, certainly not one to be, as it were, thrown away; yet his stumbling had imperiled the junk and all its crew, and all the other trackers. Who had made the choice?

In my confused reaction there was another part, too. This had to do with the owner. A few moments after the head tracker's first scream, just after his fall from the path, the owner came running

forward to see what the matter was. I caught as in a camera, and still can produce from my mind's file a fogged print of it, the expression of his face when he saw what had happened: an expression of satisfaction. His haggard, money-worn face was clearly satisfied in the first instant of seeing the head tracker hanging there. Then at once the threat to his property, to the junk and its cargo, and to himself, must have struck the owner, and anxiety rushed in to jostle the first reflex aside. Close behind the owner came his wife, young and lantern-bright, and her face, too, I saw. Her first response was far from that of her husband: she was crushed by what she saw. Her sorrow must have been deep, deep; its frozen weight must have held it down; only a small part of it showed on the surface. Her response was the one I would have expected also from him, for I had thought the head tracker was a kind of helping son to him; thus the owner's reflex troubled and puzzled me.

Another factor: the cook's phlegmatic reaction. At the moment of the head tracker's first shriek, the cook had been squatting on his heels not far from me on the foredeck over the fourth cargo compartment of the junk near his open-air galley brazier; he had been peeling turnips, as I have said, and had been humming along with Old Pebble's songs. After the first cry, when I heard the Old Big rushing noisily forward to investigate and turned my head to watch him come (and perhaps, I dare say, to look for Su-ling, who was sure to be close behind him), my gaze brushed across the cook, who was still squatting, still peeling, and even still humming, though now he was, with the same precise little tune-stitches, basting not the tracker's silken music but the coarse sacking of others' screams and worried shouts. His face was placid. His eyes were on his work. Later I looked at him again, and he had still not lifted his face to the scene on the wall of the gorge. I had seen that he was friendly with the head tracker; many evenings on the river those two had entertained us all. Could the cook not bear to watch what was happening? Or was he simply not interested? Had it something to do with "enough" on the Great River? Or with grief? That humming!

Most puzzling of all: What had been in Old Pebble's mind at the

moment of his fall? Had something about Mêng Liang's ladder made him think suddenly about my dam which would mean the end of all trackers? I did not know; I do not know.

I looked up at the cliff. No one seemed to have any idea what to do. The great craft shook and yawed. The bells chirped. I was afraid. The bow steersman walked calmly back to the cook's brazier and poured himself some tea. The men on the bow sweep stood silent, with hooded eyes. The cook hummed. The sampan pounded the hull.

The owner began to jump up and down on the foredeck, screaming to whichever trackers carried knives (against this very contingency, among others, I suppose) to cut the braided bamboo rope on which the head tracker was suspended and let him drown, and then tow away. I can see now that there was probably no alternative to this. The effort of hoisting Old Pebble back up the towpath might have been enough, when subtracted from the effort of towing, or merely of holding the heavy junk where it was, to have allowed the current to wrest the boat from the control of the remaining trackers and carry it, without steerageway and therefore helpless, onto well-known perils downstream; and in any case, the rock towpath cut from the cliff would not have given room for leverage on the part of enough men to hoist the head tracker up again. Thus, his drowning had been determined by his first misstep. Dimly I think I realized this certainty at the time, though I had certainly not been prepared for it beforehand.

The owner literally danced on the foredeck, leaping up and down and flapping his black cotton gown, like a huge, earthbound, logy, death-excited buzzard, and he called out in rattling accents to the trackers to cut the fallen man away and start up again. The head tracker swinging on the rope against the rocks protested in harsh echoing cries. Su-ling began to whimper in tones as soft as her usual laughter. The swift water made a rushing sound on every hand.

At first the trackers did nothing. I was amazed at their steadiness, holding all that wood against all that water. For what reward? With what in their minds during that minute? They leaned and

pulled and did not move, though the owner screamed for action.

It was at last the third man who, straining forward all the time, slowly pulled from his cotton bellyband a short dirk, honed on one side of the blade, and with what seemed feeble pecking and tapping motions began to fret the thick towing hawser at the place where it hung over the edge of the path. He could not reach the head tracker's sennit, which was over the side of the cliff. His efforts seemed weak because he could spare so little from his share of the work of braking the junk. And could one doubt that he was reluctant? The man who had been second on the hawser huddled against the cliff, helping to hold the junk and bearing Old Pebble's weight. He must have been wonderfully strong.

I will never forget that scene in those few moments — the boiling gutter of Wind-Box Gorge between fantastic vertical limestone masses nearly a thousand feet high; the head tracker hanging twenty feet above the freshet in the white cotton loop of his towing harness, screaming not so much for rescue, which he must have known to be impossible, as in protest against his certain mortality, while the forty-odd other trackers, leaderless, leaned frozen against their towing halters, straining with turgid thighs and started veins simply to hold the eighty-ton junk against the springtime river, in a slanting, rigid, silent tableau, like that of some frieze of long-ago times; the junk trembling under our feet and yawing in the flood; the owner flapping his gown and his thin beard, shouting his half of a fateful duet, ordering the others to hurry and cut away the head tracker and get on with hauling the junk out of the whispering race of the Yangtze to the town beyond; the impasse of reluctance and horror; my incredulity....

I stood on the deck shocked. The cook hummed on. The owner urged speed, and Su-ling moaned with a subdued grief which seemed impersonal, timeless — the endless grief of suffering poor people in the face of disaster. I could hear the bow steersman slurping in his teacup. I was nearly struck down by a rush of agony and anger, and of pity for the head tracker, and suddenly forgetting all my doubts about him I thought him what he had said he was, a simple good man, and I thought his fate unfair, and his companions' indifference to it seemed to me unspeakably savage,

and I felt a desperate love of life, of my own life, and I watched the slow gnawing of the bamboo hawser up there. If that was a minute, it was a very long one. It made me come close to sensing the meaning of the most awesome concepts: paralysis, burial, infinity.

By the time I was able to move, it was already much too late. But even had I been able to act sooner, I doubt that I could have changed anything.

I ran to the Old Big and pushed him in the chest with my fists, and shouted to him to stop what was happening.

He kept right on shrieking over my shoulder, commanding the man with the knife to hurry.

I pushed and protested; he dodged and urged. I guess we did a sort of dance of death on the slapping planks of the foredeck.

Thus it happened that my back was turned when the head tracker fell into the river. I heard the brief final scream of complaint and prayer, and then there was nothing but water-sound, boat-sound, and bell-sound, and even they seemed hushed.

I spun around. I saw in the water a flash of white shoulder band. A blue-clad rump rolled over; a hand reached for the rungless sky. For a moment the strong struggling man got his head above water, but at once he was dragged frightfully under again.

"Ayah!" the remaining trackers shouted in their changeless tone. They had taken a step upriver, while the thrashing body was not yet even opposite us.

I heard the owner grunt, "Ayah!" echoing the trackers and seeming to want to add to their strength the push of his lungs, but their word was an expression in his throat of despair and weariness.

There were sounds of such strange feelings in this utterance that I could not help tearing my eyes from the rolling man in the water, now abreast of us, to the face of the owner beside me. Its deep lines were contorted; its half-veiled eyes and beard-fringed lips were terribly bitter.

What *had* gone through the mind of the Old Big, to write such changes on the crumpled parchment he wore for a face? Delight,

fear, murderousness, bitterness. I shall never know; I know only that those changes hit me full and hard, and had their part in making that day one that has haunted my whole life.

As I watched, the expression of bitterness was quickly changing, firming, as when new ice spreads its brooding feathers over a lake on a wintry night.

Then this tight-stretched, rope-muscled man leapt into a surprising action — an action of utmost charity.

He ran with springy steps across the deck, and cast off the painter of the sampan from the tholepins where it had been cleated, and in his wide-sleeved black gown jumped like a side-slipping crow from the deck of the junk onto the floorboards of the small boat, which heaved and skidded away from the junk with the crash of his weight. The boat whirled quickly away from us, with the Old Big miraculously standing up in it. Su-ling gasped once and was silent thereafter.

I heard the owner shout the head tracker's name in a hoarse desperate cackle.

"Ayah! . . . Ayah! . . ." The junk was moving forward now.

I saw the owner bend down and pick up a sculling oar and straighten up, waving the T-handled blade to help keep his balance. The cup of a boat shook and dipped and spun in the mad waters, and now the owner's face was toward us, howling the name of his head tracker, and now we saw his back as he fought, still standing, to keep his balance, making me think of the mock-drunk rope-walkers I had seen in the circuses of my boyhood.

He actually managed from time to time to dip the oar blade in the water, in a surely futile effort to speed his would-be merciful voyage. He went away from us very fast. From a distance, in that haste-spoiled water, we could not see whether the head tracker was getting his head out any more. The owner disappeared around a bend in the river, flapping and chopping in a regular semaphore of his amazing balance, a tiny black staggering figure in the huge water-cut from the rock mountain, a tiny human being way off there, erect, incredibly brave, crying out in the echoing gorge to his needed companion and support, whom he would save if he could.

"Ayah! . . . Ayah! . . ."

The cook, whose humming had stopped with the fall, and who afterwards had been standing on the deck watching with the rest of us, gave a quiet order to the drummer, suggesting a signal for a slightly faster pace, and reminding the drummer that the drum alone would set the trackers' rate of progress now. In this way the cook paid tribute to the absence of the head tracker's haunting chanteys, and also took command of the junk.

"Ayah! . . . Ayah! . . . Ayah! . . . Ayah! . . ."

I barely noticed how we got through the upper mouth of the gorge, for I was full of what I had seen, dazed by it, and sad.

The negotiation of that final half-mile or so — that was all, but how much! — must have called for something like a miracle from the trackers, something above heart and sinew. The men were without leadership, and they had to go through the worst stretch of the river we had yet seen. I really believe that more was required of our forty-odd men as we passed the upper limits of Wind-Box Gorge than had been asked of the three hundred fifty hired-on rag bags at the New Rapids, who leaned there on the lines but did not extend themselves, and certainly did not drain the very lees of their spirits, as our trackers must have done at the mouth of the gorge, stretching their strength beyond belief.

Yet our going through safely was not a miracle. It was a triumph of unremarkable men, a triumph of their patience and of the astounding love for each other of poverty-stricken brothers in pain and trouble.

They had eaten nothing all day. They had suffered the loss of a friend at their very feet. They had lost, too, their accustomed master, and though they may have hated the owner, and though probably none of them had seen with his eyes the Old Big's going, they must have heard his piercing cries of remorse and helpless, tottering need as the sampan rushed away from us, and they must have heard the name he called and must have known the meaning of those shouts. Now there were no more beautiful songs. Now only the hollow drum hummed to them from the junk.

Yet somehow they hauled us through.

As I say, I hardly saw any of this happen. I sat on the coil of rope thinking of Old Pebble.

I wondered again what he had been thinking about in those last moments, and whether his fall had been sheer accident or if he had been felled, as it were, by an idea, by some realization. Had he thought of the dam?

That possibility, crossing my mind for the second time, made me shudder.

Then I felt a strange revulsion and doubt. Had Old Pebble really been singing as beautifully as I had thought — or had the burning intensity of those last few minutes before his fall been in *my* mind only? Was it possible that he had been singing exactly as he had always sung, and that fear and excitement and aspiration, which I had felt on seeing the holes of Mêng Liang's ladder, had sharpened *my* senses?

What did I feel? As yet I scarcely knew. I was tired and puzzled.

Old Pebble was dead. He had been a nobody, a ragged faceless tracker among thousands of ragged faceless trackers on the Great River. His death changed nothing; there would be no obituaries. Even his closest friend, the cook, had scarcely seemed to notice his death. His body was in the river, but that did not change the river. Could the river be changed? Was Su-ling right — could *nothing* change the Great River?

Gradually, as if waking from a dream, I began to think more coherent thoughts. Of course the river could be changed. I was an engineer. I dealt with facts. Dams were made of steel and concrete. The holes in Mêng Liang's ladder were cut into hard stone. The water above a dam would one day cover many of those holes. An engineer dealt with objective facts. There was no place in my life for shadowy thoughts about faceless nobodies. Old Pebble was dead.

Yet I could not help remembering what the head tracker had told me he wanted of life: to pull on the towline, a little wine when he went ashore, a hoard of friendship. That was all. A dam was not among the things he listed. Had there been a dam he would not have died. Would he have wanted a dam if he had known that?

I am not at all sure. He wanted to haul junks, drink wine, and have friends.

I had been in a great hurry to survey this river. What did I think now about my dam — about skimming a millennium in a day?

At some time — it must have been while we were still in the mouth of the gorge — I thought of Su-ling. I remembered that after the Old Big had gone out of sight down the river, Su-ling had run sobbing through the arch of the main cabin aft across the conning deck to her small home on the junk, and the owner's. Its door had slammed shut. I wanted to help her now, as she had so often helped me through uneasy times on this voyage, and I went astern and knocked on the cabin door.

There was no answer, and I knocked again, and again, repeatedly, but the silence within held. I opened the door and walked in.

This was the first time I had been in the after-house. It was dark there. There was a tiny square opening for light and air high on the sloping transom wall opposite me. Dimly I made out two wide wooden bunks on either side, each with a reed mat spread on it. The place seemed bare and clean. I was surprised not to see Su-ling curled on one of the bunks, weeping. Her love was lost; her husband, I assumed, was also dead. Finally, as my eyes adjusted to the darkness, I saw her standing directly in front of me, with her back to me. She was gazing with wide dry eyes into a mirror that was fastened to a stanchion, with the meager light from the little window on her face.

Becoming aware of me, she turned and brushed past me and walked out onto the conning deck. Her face was the one she always showed, unfurrowed, sweet, and bright, with only the tuck of everlasting woe at the corner of her mouth to show for the day's catastrophes. She did not look at me. Her hands worked at one ear-lobe as she walked, then at the other, and following her I saw her go to the port side, facing the open river, and there she threw the red earrings Old Pebble had given her into the man-eating water.

She wheeled and went quickly back into the cabin. I did not

go in after her, because it was clear that she wanted to be alone.

The door closed, and then, within, I heard deep muffled sobs from this river girl who did her best to hide her feelings from the world.

Of our getting out of the gorge, I remember only one sight that makes me realize how fierce the effort of the trackers must have been — the sight of the great sentinel-rock at the very gate, against the upper face of which the rushing river was smoothly mounded up, as water is piled in a hill around the prow of a blunt swift-moving cargo vessel.

At length we somehow reached the placid open valley above the gorge. The river was wide there, and calm, like a slowly moving lake, if such a thing could be. The surcease from quaking and rocking, and the sudden total lifting of danger, gave me a queer feeling of being suddenly sleepy, drugged, let wholly down into good darkness. One would have thought the trackers' cries should have been triumphant here, for surely they had overreached their known powers, and they had passed out of the gate of the last of the gorges, and they must have felt themselves great men in their line, and close friends; but their groan-shout was unchanged, and it had the selfsame sound of the trackers' cry which had not changed for two or three thousand years, half agony, half exultation, a patient measuring of steps in time and space: "Ayah! . . . Ayah! . . ."

It was dark by the time we anchored for the night, off the banks of Kweifu. The cook divided the enormous supper he had prepared for the owner among the bowls of the trackers, who would otherwise have received that night, as every other night, rations of rice palliated with a few snippets of fried cabbage. They ate bolting like curs and lay down and slept at once.

The cook cleaned his pots by lantern light. Then he bundled up his belongings and carried them aft with the lantern and moved into the owner's cabin, from which Su-ling's helpless sobs still came. I lay in my bedroll so taken up with all I had seen and felt that day that I was not even surprised or angered by this invasion of the cook's. The trackers moaned in their sleep — the only mourning I ever heard them give Old Pebble, who had once told

me he would surely have a fine funeral, bought with the coppers of friendship. I could see through the cracks in the cabin wall that the lantern shone within. Late at night I still heard Su-ling's weeping, and over it I heard the clicking of an abacus, as the cook, in his new rôle as commander of the junk, made calculations of wages and probable sales and possible profits.

I was up very early the next morning, as it was barely getting light. Some distance from our anchorage, I saw the salt wells of Kweifu, where, though the rise of the river had brought the season of work almost to an end, the scores of massive half-buried caldrons along the riverbank were still being fired day and night and were all boiling. From our viewpoint, when the first pink rays of sunlight slanted through the gate of the gorges onto the field of steam, it looked as if the vapors of a still-hot inner earth were escaping to the regions of man.

The cook had to go ashore to buy a sampan, and I went with him, to see the wells; we disembarked onto a shelf of shale by a long plank.

At the wells I was greeted by the sight of hundreds of naked men toiling up and down the spiral interior paths of the enormous brine pits. I began at first, seeing these figures that reminded me of Blake and Dante and Milton, to feel some kind of shallow theoretical distress, over men like these who were forced to do the work, not merely of animals, but of the most primitive machines, and this tripped off, as it made me think first of our trackers, then sharply of Old Pebble, and of the harrowing previous day, an overwhelming emotion of personal loss, and a very strong feeling of waste; cringing back from the brink of one of the huge conical pits, I was overcome by a sudden rage.

Later, back on the junk, as we moved on upriver, trying to purge myself of some of this anger, which lingered on, I tried to tell the cook that I knew of a well-known brand of submersible pump, which looked like a diving-bell, that could have been bought for no more, surely, than a month's wages for all the well-slaves of Kweifu and that alone would do the work of all those men, and would free them.

The cook dismissed me and my pump by saying that our salt wouldn't taste good.

I bit my lip and turned to Su-ling and said with a sad heart that the sea had a different smell from that of the brine pits; the pits smelled only of bitter salt, of tears and sweat, while the sea smells of the sun and spindrift and seaweed and voyages and living things. . . . But Su-ling only stared, unhearing.

We were all moody that day. We were out of the gorge; it was an easy day on the river. We made twenty miles. We were all quiet.

Some of the crew came to the cook in the evening and asked him to get out paper and brush and ink block and write a letter for them to the Emperor of the Dead at Fengtu, requesting a passport for their head tracker to that place where all good junkmen go.

The cook was disgusted; he said that this was a silly thing to do. All the same, he wrote the letter and gave it to the men, and they put it into the celestial post — which is to say, they burned it in the cook's charcoal brazier.

Condescendingly the cook said to me, "Ignorant men!" I thought of the day at the New Rapids when he and the head tracker had sacrificed the cock at the stem beam; of his look then of half-trust, half-belief.

I asked the cook why no one ever spoke of the owner.

He said the owner was not dead; he would be back.

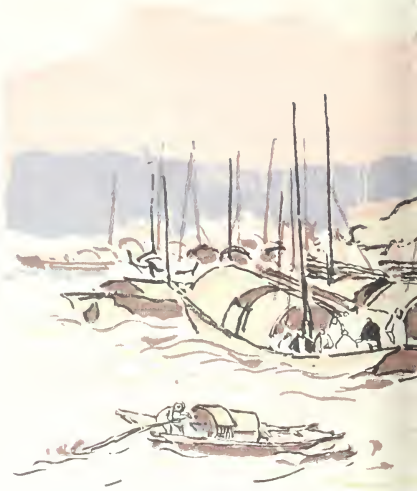
I asked how he could know that.

He replied that the owner, one of the best boatmen on the river, had been in a boat, and he was surely alive and would come back; whereas Old Pebble, one of the best trackers on the river, had been *in* the river, and, he said, "The river when it is rising never gives back a life."

If the request for a passport from the Emperor of the Dead was absurd, where, then, I asked, was the head tracker's soul; what had become of the spirit that had made the songs of work so incredibly happy? Where was it now? Where would it go?

The cook looked across the gunwale at the dark river away from me and slowly asked, "Where does the flame go when we put a fire out?"

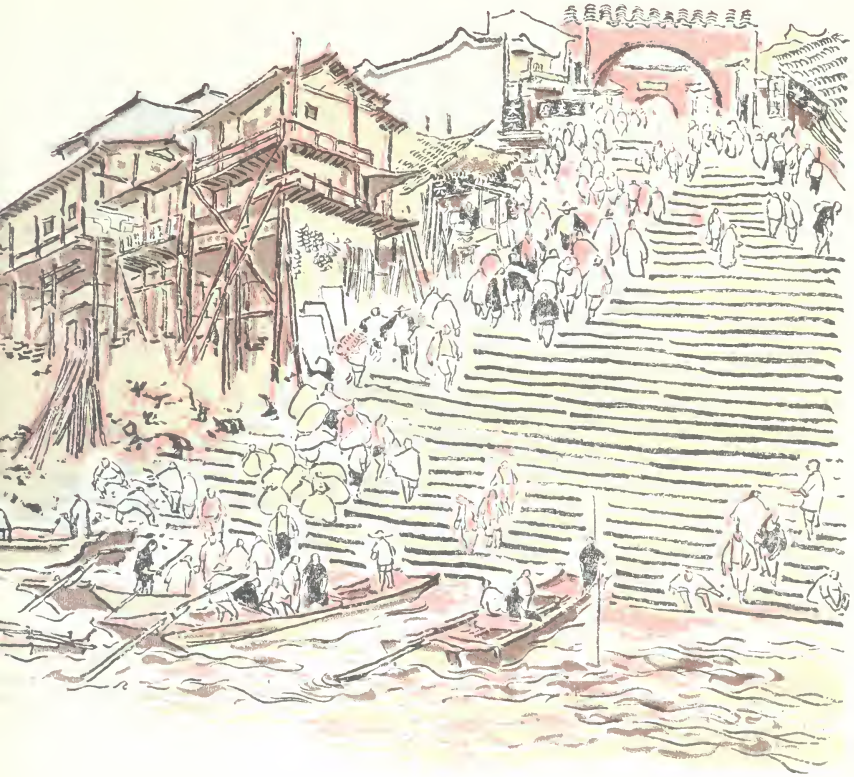
It took us three days to reach Wanhsien. The cook had discussed with Su-ling whether we should lie idle somewhere and wait for the owner, who, they both felt sure, would catch a ride up the river on another man's junk; they decided, in view of the ever-rising waters, to go on, and after three days, moving through foothills on a swift but not dangerous river, we came during a sunset hour to our destination.



We passed a pagoda of thirteen storeys and then, at a great elbow in the river, arrived at the city of Wanhsien. We moored on the opposite bank.

We saw across the way a city built on a hill among hills. On the far horizon were high mountains, their rock foreheads red in the evening light, and below them were darker ranges of flat-topped hills, which in the faint low-lying mists of evening seemed a series of long cardboard cut-outs standing in the mysterious soft thick whitish-purple air, one in front of the other; and nearer still were terraced hills luxuriant with precious tung trees, layered early wheat, and rape and barley and beans, and poppies in a mist-softened clamor of bloom.

All these hills embraced the loud hill of the city, which, capped with a teeming architecture above the flood line, was widely split, directly across from us, by an amazing stairway. The stone stairs must have been twice as wide as the great boulevards of Western cities, and they rose and rose and rose from the surface of the river to the very crown of the life on the heights; at any level of the Great River, sampans could touch at the stairs and their passengers could



alight with a sense of the hospitality of the place and go up to its turmoil with a certain amount of dignity.

We tied up in a forest of masts across the water, amid shouting and a bustle that was as dazzling and depressing, in its different way, as the churning waters of the lonely river had been.

Here was a terminal of commerce, a big shifting-place of rice and salt and coal and cotton and tree oil and paper made from bamboo, and many other wanted things, and the greeds and lusts and bitternesses of the floating market were noisy and confusing, after the weeks of the spare, melancholy sounds of our progress up the river.

Up from the city across from us, besides, drifted a cloud of the sounds of humanity: hawking, screams of laughter, the claims of beggars on their fellow men, the kitten-cry of infants, venders'

drums, the noise of bells and fiddles, the chants of magicians and jugglers, the moaning and intonations of priests and religious maniacs, and the underlying murmur of gossip, games, neighborly argument, story-telling, love-making — of all kinds of evening solace for hard daytime toil.

I did not want to leave the junk to go into that noisy town, but I knew I must. The cook told me the name of an inn on a street on the brow of the town that was suitable, he said with a pucker of his lips that expressed some kind of irony, for junk owners and foreigners. I packed my Gladstone bag and then stood on deck while a young tracker was sent to fetch a taxi-sampan that would ferry me across the river.

As I waited I had an inspiration, to put off the heavy feeling of impending loneliness that oppressed me: Su-ling and the cook and the bow steersman and the helmsman and the drummer and the rope coiler — all the specialists, about a dozen boatmen — must come to the inn and be my guests at a banquet of farewell that evening.

The cook and Su-ling demurred; they said they wanted the honor of entertaining me, but I could see that their protests were ceremonial, and we soon settled the matter in my favor.

I had a melancholy sense of the finality of this parting from the junk, but when I feelingly called, "Until again!" to the trackers, to those ragged wonders who had brought us through the gate of Wind-Box Gorge and who now sat apathetic under their mat shed, lice-picking, snoozing, staring, too poor to go ashore and celebrate their little victory over time and space and the river — too familiar, perhaps, with unending pain and work and loss and aches even to have seen it as a victory; when I called a heartfelt informal farewell to them, I say, only two or three looked up at me, and those gaped at me as if I were a total stranger, and did not even grunt a reply but went back to their trivial concerns.

The sampan came by, with two rowers, and already loaded with nearly a dozen passengers, and a mound of their goods, so that the light boat had only a few inches of freeboard and might easily be overturned, yet I had no choice but to pack myself and my bag aboard, and we pulled away from the junk, and when we were

fifty feet away I could not tell the vessel on which I had lived for all those days from the others with which it was tied in a crowd of sameness. The junks were all alike. Could each of them have had a trip upriver like ours? And could this have been going on for three or four thousand years?

Our boatmen poled us far upstream in the quiet shallow water along the bank, then, a mile above the city, they dropped their poles, took up oars, and rowed out into the swift current with all their strength. We went diagonally across and down toward the wide stairs of the city. With each push of the oars the ferrymen stamped their feet and gave out a kind of grunt, a rudimentary "Ayah! . . ."

When I heard that sound I was overwhelmed with emotion. The scene in Wind-Box Gorge leaped vividly into my mind, and I closed my eyes and saw again the disturbing trifles — the Old Big's expression, the blank face of the humming cook, the hesitant third tracker pecking at the hawser with his knife, Su-ling in true despair, the bow steersman slaking his thirst at the teapot, and the doomed head tracker himself thrashing at the end of the rope — and the water; the froth and waves of the Great River. Then in that unstable sampan, in mid-current, I felt the beginnings of something I had never experienced before at that age, a feeling very deep that I would have found hard then to define — something close to anger, yet close as well to love, a feeling in which pain and joy were mixed; something like determination; perhaps the very first stirring of understanding in me, though I was terribly troubled still by the many things I did not understand. This strange new feeling was, at any rate, more a physical sensation than anything else in those first moments, an upsurge in my chest of elation-with-despair, of a palpable ache that somehow gave me comfort. I know now, for I have experienced it often, that this feeling was really a kind of wishing — that things could be different, that I could be a better person, that the world could be a better place; and with the wishing, a feeling of sadness, regret, and even, it may be, of hopelessness. Many of my friends say they have had this feeling, too; it seems to be a common sensation of our anxious era, which rushes along as swiftly as the Great River in flood. The feeling quickly

passed that time, supplanted by a rush of the misery of parting — of leave-taking from a place that demanded awe, from an experience I could never forget, and from human beings whom I had come close to understanding.

Our ferrymen made their landfall, after ten minutes of hard work, at the very center of the stone stairway to the city. They charged me three times as much as any of the Chinese aboard, and for a few moments I was very angry. I remember that during my brief altercation with the ferrymen I absent-mindedly patted the watch pocket in my trousers and was spurred to new heights of pettiness, contempt, and frustrating anger by a sharp thought of my golden timepiece stolen on the junk.

The ferrymen shouted loudly at me and made me appear to be a robber and oppressor for balking at paying them only three times the normal fare, and a crowd gathered, and I was soon very much out of sorts.

I paid off the ferrymen and asked my way to the inn.

The whole noisy crowd offered to lead the way, and we set off in a human wave up the stairway. Beggars pressed around me, touching my arms and whispering their needs. Friendly men offered to carry my bag, but thievery and high rates were in my mind, and I clutched the handle ever more fiercely. We flowed up to the crest of the city, gathering new adherents all the way.

At last we came to the inn. The door was locked. One of my most aggressive bodyguards, a grinning hunched-over lad with a great white fungus scab-cap on his shaven crown, pulled the handle of the doorbell, and far away, above the noise of my personal crowd, I heard a tiny ringing — and again was stirred by strong feelings, as I thought of the tinkling of the masthead bells in the gorge.

Soon a white-bearded man dressed in a silk gown appeared at the door, and he bowed to me; then he darted inside for a moment and reappeared with a bamboo staff and began screaming at my followers and flailing about with the dangerous rod. The crowd fell back, cursing and laughing, but did not adjourn.

How grand it made me feel, I confess, to have been greeted by a man clothed in silk!

The man, who turned out to be a brother of the innkeeper, pushed me inside the door and quickly bolted it. One could hear the crowd suddenly murmur and melt.

I negotiated for a room, ordered several dishes for my modest banquet, and then at once asked for a bath.

In a dark, damp, moldy-smelling cavern at the back of the inn I was presently squatting shoulder-deep in a round wooden tub of painfully hot water, and I stayed in it, lathering, rinsing, and growing happier and happier, till it was tepid. Then I put on clean clothes from my bag. I lay down on the brick bed in my white-washed room to wait for my guests. I felt like a new person. I even began to think back through the gorges in quest of the memory of a suitable dam site.

From the moment the innkeeper's brother came bursting into my room to tell me that there were some "river people" at the gate asking for me, I knew that my idea of having a banquet had been a mistake. He looked ill of a bad smell.

I walked with him out into the front courtyard of the inn, and soon I stood with Su-ling and the cook and the others in a reception parlor and stared at them, grotesque in their dirty quilted cotton clothes beside the graceful city man in his silken gown, who looked thunderstruck at the news that *these* were the foreigner's guests, and my heart sank.

Su-ling stood at a disadvantage before a delicate Coromandel screen; her wrists looked thick, and greasy strings of hair dangled over her cheek. The boatmen glanced around with wide, unsophisticated eyes. They talked and laughed very loudly. I yearned for my now lost illusion of the simple beauty my friends had seemed to have at home on the junk.

We sat at a table in a private room. The boatmen ate noisily. Su-ling beside me spoke not a word and ate little.

I ordered a bottle of rice wine and would have started some toasts, in an effort to break our sad reserve, but not having experienced the local way of exchanging toasts, man to man, I proposed a general drinking, to the Great River. The junkmen did not understand my intention, and they stared rather fearfully at me,

as if I had uttered some kind of curse. The cook eventually found the means of drinking more than his share of the bottle.

Later in the difficult meal I blurted out a question. Could not Old Pebble have been spared?

"Finished," the half-drunk cook said. "He was finished."

Was it simply, then, that Old Pebble had done the work of his days and was exhausted, his heart spent? Was it simply that he had come to his time of "enough" on the Great River? I was an engineer; this concept angered me. "There should have been some way to save him," I said.

"Ayah, he was greedy," the cook said, with a hateful expression. "He wanted to own the junk. He wanted to be in charge of everybody."

I shrugged my shoulders. I thought the cook was really talking about himself. I tried to get some comment from Su-ling, but her eyes remained fixed on her nearly full plate, and she was silent.

The teapot went around and around the table, but we never attained anything like ease.

Then there was a fuss in the inn, and the owner of our junk rushed into our room. He was even filthier than the rest of his people, and he looked terribly gaunt and soul-burnt; his stringy muscles all seemed knotted and stretched, and his eyes were fierce within reddened lids.

I saw the cook's face fall in an almost comical way when he saw the Old Big, even though he had declared himself certain that the owner would rejoin us.

The owner was in a rage. What was the idea of leaving the junk, fully loaded, in the power of a handful of turtles? What were his specialists doing in *this* place?

I tried to ask him to sit down and join us.

He ignored me. He shouted to the cook that the junk was moored in a very bad place, that unloading from that place would be impossible; the junk would have to be moved; they must all come away at once and move the junk to a place nearer the tax scales.

I asked as firmly as I could what news there was of Old Pebble.

"No way, no way," the owner irritably said.

Then he turned on the cook and asked with a cracking voice

what the meaning was of the cook's having moved his possessions into the after-cabin.

The boatmen were mostly standing now. Su-ling got up. I saw that our little party was over, and I felt very unhappy.

In a somewhat secretive way I murmured to Su-ling my thanks for all she had taught me.

"Don't be polite," she casually said. I sought in her eyes some sign of deeper feeling than her tossing out of this formula had contained, but she turned away and looked at the owner.

I stepped right in front of the Old Big and thanked him for the passage on his boat.

"You owe me money," he said, looking me straight in the eyes.

"But I paid the agreed sum in advance," I said. "I paid it all at Ichang."

"You owe me for food," he said in a surly way.

"It was agreed that food was included," I protested. "You agreed to that."

"Food is never included," the owner said.

I did not want to argue. At my age I wanted a sentimental parting. "How much?" I asked.

"Two taels."

"But that is impossible! That is half again the whole charge you made at Ichang."

"I lost my Noise Suppressor," the owner suddenly shouted, as if all his calamities were my fault. "I gave up a sampan. We have a bad mooring. The cook sleeps in my bed. What do you want, food for nothing?"

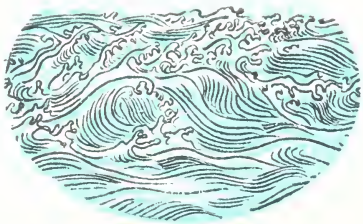
I paid the price and my guests sheepishly began to crowd out of the room. I could not engage Su-ling's eyes.

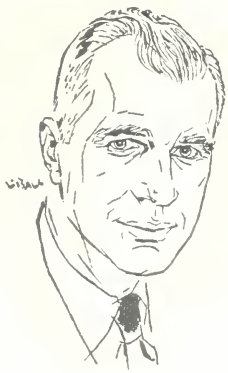
"Until again!" I said as cheerfully as I could.

"Until again," some of the boatmen mumbled, though they must have known, as I did, that there would never be an again.

I went to my room, and lay down, and for a short time suffered the blackest melancholy. I soon found myself reliving, all over again, those hours in Wind-Box Gorge; I lay wide awake, with my eyes tight closed, and once more every detail was vivid, stark, and personal. I do not know how long this went on. Suddenly, as I

thought of the owner going after the drowning man in the light skiff on the awful water, I was gripped once again by the strange new sensation I had felt in the ferry-sampan crossing the river at dusk — a pang of wishing and despairing so strong that it both exalted and almost choked me. It was very strange. I began, with surprising speed, perhaps as a reaction to these violent feelings, to recover my spirits and, yes, my belief in the dam. This was just the first of it. Four months later I wrote an optimistic, even fervent, report on the possibilities of a dam in Yellow Cat Gorge, where, after further study, during a trip downriver by steamer, the site seemed to me best of all. It is clear that nothing ever came of that report, or of me. Indeed, my great career began and ended with that sheaf of papers. It was dismissed and I was tagged by sound men as impractical. The tag is still on me. The dam is still to be built. It will be, one day — of that I am sure. I feel now again, as I think back, the pang of wishing. I had it very strongly that night on the brick *k'ang* in the inn in Wanhsien, as I lay on my back on the hard bed turning over in my mind all that I had seen and felt on the river, and thinking of the head tracker and the owner and Suling and the cook and the others. I lay wide awake, aching and wishing. I could hear the buzz of the citizens of Wanhsien through the paper-paned window of my room. I heard an itinerant storyteller pass by with a crude shadow-scope, a kind of stereopticon that I had seen in towns downriver, and I heard him wail out his advertisements of famous things to be heard and seen at the modest charge of one round copper coin. Through distant streets wandered a timekeeper, beating on a gong the hours as they fled. All that night the Great River climbed the steps of the myriad city.





John Hersey

JOHN HERSEY was born in Tientsin, China, of American parents, in 1914. He came home to attend Hotchkiss School, in Connecticut, graduated from Yale, and studied at Cambridge University for a year. Back in the United States, he began a distinguished career as an editor and war correspondent for *Time* and *Life* and, finally, as one of the most widely acclaimed and best-known authors in the country.

Most of his books have been based on his broad and accurate knowledge of many countries and cultures. *A Bell for Adano,* which won the Pulitzer Prize, is a novel set in wartime Italy. *The Wall* is a moving tragedy of Polish ghetto life under Nazi occupation. In *Men on Bataan,* Hersey reported firsthand on the Philippines, and in the famed *Hiroshima* he told of the destruction wreaked on that city by the atom bomb.

Married, and the father of four children, Mr. Hersey lives in Fairfield County, Connecticut. For some years he has been active in the field of education, and is a member of the Board of Trustees of the National Citizens' Council for the Public Schools.

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